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ABSTRACT

A collection of articles from a 1993 British seminar on language issues in distance education includes: "The End of Distance Education" (Iredale); "The Logistics of Distance Language Teaching" (Turner); "The Open University and Language Issues" (Floyd); "Language Issues in Distance Education at Tertiary Level" (Graddol); "Textual Strategies for Diverse Audiences" (Graddol); "In-Service Teacher Training: The Rotary Foundation Litraid Project in Zimbabwe" (Louw and Trewby); "Teacher Education and Empowerment" (Edge and Ellis); "Mauritius College of the Air" (Smith and Morrison); "Distance Learning for Non-Formal Education" (Dodds); "The Potential for Distance Education: The Linguistic Challenge, and Meeting that Challenge" (Slaven); "Language Issues in English Medium, Tertiary Level Distance Education Courses for ESL Learners" (Creed, Koul, and Parrott); "The Opportunity Cost of Distance Education" (Boyle); "The Practicalities of Running a Distance Learning Programme" (Walsh); "The Costs of Distance Education" (Morrison and Taylor); "Cognitive Styles and the Design of Instructional Materials" (Smith); "The Role of Computer Conferencing in Distance Education" (Pincas); "The Multimedia Teleschool: Telematics and Language Learning" (Jenning); "The Use of Satellites in Distance Education" (Brockley and Germaine); "BBC WSTV Presentation" (Ruddiford); "BBC English Workshop" (Farum, Norbrook, and Cox); "Appropriacy of Distance Learning Technologies for Particular Groups of Learners and Countries" (Moore); "What Have We Learned and Where Are We Going?" (Webber). Session summaries, a seminar schedule, and a list of participants are also included. (MSE)

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# Dunford Seminar Report 1993

## Language issues in distance education

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# Dunford Seminar Report 1993

Language issues in distance education

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## The Dunford Seminar

This is an annual seminar run by the English Language Division of the British Council. It focuses on ODA-funded ELT projects and serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas and experience through the participation of ELT professionals involved in various areas of project delivery. These include British Council career officers, British Council contract English Language Teaching Officers (ELTOs) who are funded by the ODA, UK Higher Education ELT specialists and representatives from private sector institutions. The seminar functions as a think-tank on the design, implementation and evaluation of ELT projects. The report is distributed to a wide readership in the profession in the UK and throughout the developing world.

## Previous seminar topics

1978 ESP course design

1979 ELT course design

1980 Communicative Methodology

1981 Design, evaluation and testing in English language projects

1982 Teacher training and the curriculum

1983 Design and implementation of teacher-training programmes

1984 Curriculum and syllabus design in ELT

1985 Communication skills training in bilateral aid

1986 Appropriate methodology

1987 ELT and development: the place of English language teaching in aid programmes

1988 ELT in development aid: defining aims and measuring results
1989 Managing ELT aid projects for sustainability

1990 Training for sustainability of ELT aid projects

1991 The social and economic impact of ELT in development

1992 Communication skills in development: the role of ELT

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# PREFACE

This, the sixteenth Dunford seminar to date, broke new ground in at least two ways. Firstly it focused on a topic, Distance Education, which had not been dealt with in previous Dunford seminars and secondly it sought to address general 'language issues' within that topic rather than concerns relating solely to the English Language. The success of the seminar in addressing these topics fully and effectively was very largely due to the extremely high quality of presentations made and to the quality of debate that these presentations stimulated. Participants were evidently excited by the possibilities that Distance Education offers and concerned to exploit to the full potential for language learning and for education in general.

The seminar was given direction and purpose by the four keynote speakers who addressed it on the first morning. Professor Turner's, Dr Floyd's and Professor Iredale's papers follow this Preface. Dr Roger Bowers of the British Council began the seminar by setting Distance Education in its general educational context and then by outlining some issues relating specifically to Distance Education. Dr Bowers made clear the need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of Distance methods as compared to non-distance methodology. He emphasised the importance of transferring understanding from traditional contact methods to Distance Education and by applying standard evaluation criteria to Distance programmes. It was by such means that a realistic appreciation of the potential of Distance methods could be achieved.

Dr Roger Bowers further set the context of the seminar by listing many of the major issues relating to Distance Education. The list included, amongst others,:-

- 'the demographic imperative', ie the need to find means to educate a rapidly growing world population.
- 'the democratic imperative', ie the need to provide, through open access, individualisation of development and equal opportunity policies, the maximum educational coverage within societies.
- 'skilling for employment', ie the need to enable employers to provide flexible educational opportunities for their work force in a rapidly changing environment.
- 'integration of resources and approach', ie the value of ensuring through credit transfer, recognition schemes, educational consortia and the use of new technology, that economic integration, most dramatically in Europe, is mirrored by educational integration.
- 'infrastructural issues', ie the need to consider in all Distance programmes the communications (post, telephone, roads etc) context and more generally the learner environment in terms of the cultural background of learners and their learning experiences and styles.

By examining these and other related issues, in detail, participants at the Dunford 93 Seminar came to a general consensus that Distance Education was a rapidly expanding sector and that the potential offered by new technology, combined with pressure on costs and a desire for excellence would produce exciting educational opportunities.

The extent to which these opportunities would or would not be capable of answering the challenges of the present and future was a theme which enjoyed lively debate during the seminar.

The range of opinions held was wide but there was general agreement that, whether or not these challenges could be met, methodologies and concepts associated with Distance Education and associated language issues would be of enormous benefit in enhancing the quality and availability of all forms of education. That the British Council was able, through this seminar, to contribute to this realisation is in line with the tradition that the annual Dunford Seminar is able to provide a context for creative and insightful thought by distinguished participants working at the sharp end of education in the UK and abroad.

May the tradition long continue!

Dr Richard Webber
Seminar Director.

# THE END OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

When, exactly 50 years ago, the BBC overseas service began to broadcast its English for Radio programmes, no one at the time thought of the activity specifically as distance learning, though that is what it was: an attempt to teach people over huge areas of the globe a language that was gradually gaining currency as a medium of communication and learning. Nor, indeed, is there any specific reference to distance learning in the *Book of Exodus,* even though it is quite clear that the two tablets of stone which Moses brought down from Sinai represented an early version of the communication at a distance (since the author was by definition invisible) of a series of key lessons aimed at a complete nation of learners.

Distance learning is not new. A chronicler of its development would find numerous other instances of teachers attempting to reach audiences far beyond the sound of their voice, of which the invention of the book would, of course, be one major step. Correspondence courses have been widespread and popular for many decades. Even the creation of the 'Archers' is said to have been initiated as a means of conditioning a part of the British public to think in positive ways about agriculture and its importance.

A similar process is currently being recreated by the BBC through its important quadruple programmes in Russia under the general title of 'The Marshall Plan of the Mind', supported by the ODA through the Know-How Fund, with the aim of conditioning the Russian public to develop a business sense and an awareness of the implications and operations of a free market society.

Distance learning is undoubtedly popular. It obtained its seal of approval with the creation in the 1980s of the Commonwealth of Learning with its headquarters in Vancouver and its database of distance learning courses, institutions, and bibliographies in Milton Keynes at the UK Open University, supported by the British aid programme.

The opening paragraph of the Briggs Report, 'Towards a Commonwealth of Learning' published in 1987, which led to the creation of the Commonwealth of Learning, establishes parameters that reflect the coming-together of a number of strands, from technological availability to constricted resources. It is worth quoting the first three sentences of the paragraph:

> Communications technology makes possible an expansion of educational opportunities by overcoming barriers of distance and remoteness. It enables learners, no matter how remote, to tap the full richness of Commonwealth educational resources. The recent advances in technology, including satellites and computers, along with the well tried but changing technologies of print and broadcasting, come at a time when education is facing continued challenges of expanding demand and constricted resources[1].

I shall return later to the last two words, 'constricted resources', for they represent the key issue that we need continually to keep at the front of our minds.

It is easy to see in the Briggs Report a degree of euphoria about distance learning which even led its distinguished authors to think in terms of creating a University of the Commonwealth, so enthusiastic were they at the prospect of an institution which might, in some international educational flight of the imagination, do for the Commonwealth what the Open University had done for Britain. For them, the idea of an institution with academic staff developing distance learning modules marketable throughout the Commonwealth was an enticing proposition. Moreover, the UK-funded database, a key component in the creation of a network of information about existing available courses, institutions and materials, preceded the creation of its parent institution, since it had already been brought into existence some years earlier by the United Nations University which provided its seed-corn funding, again in the belief that distance learning was a world-wide educational currency.

So, if distance learning was the flavour of the 1980s, where does it stand today? I should like to base what I have to say about language in distance learning on a simple proposition: distance learning is yesterday's news. As a medium for training, it continues to be just as valid as it was in Moses' time, but it is not the central issue that many of its exponents, whose conferences have ranged from Bangkok to Caracas, from Oslo to Vancouver, would like to believe.

As I said at the outset, distance learning owes much to the book, a device that goes back well beyond Alexandria to the Chinese. As a way of delivering education , it is a simple variation on the traditional face-to-face encounter. What has made it appear to be an art form in its own right is the modular structure which the Open University exploited so successfully in the late 1960s and early 70s, and the consequent creation of "bites" of teaching which can be analyzed for level and length, exchanged and compared with other analogous ones, and adapted or borrowed for transposition into new situations. But distance learning has simply been the catalyst for these developments which were probably inevitable anyway. The credit accumulation arrangements which the CNAA developed during the mid-1980s did not in themselves rely on distance learning, but rather on the measurement of units of learning and their equation with conventional courses.

It is worth examining some of the issues surrounding the relationship between distance learning and the developments which it has helped to promote:

(a) mode of delivery: while traditionally most teachers present their material to classes who are physically in front of them, they have always used a variety of approaches, techniques and styles of presentation. As a means of delivery, distance learning simply removes the teacher from the immediate presence of his/her pupils for some or all of the time, and it is questionable to what extent much changes, particularly when - as in some university programmes in China - the lecturer is simply a talking head who appears through a television screen rather than in person at the front of the room;

(b) modularisation: this is a more important issue (present - it is worth noting - in the Ten Commandments, which broke the teaching material into a number of easily digestible lessons to make the material more memorable). Modularisation is the central issue, for it is the characteristic that will influence education for the rest of the twentieth century more than any other. Distance learning has enabled educationalists to think in terms of learning "bites", which can be picked up, repackaged and transferred to another place, institution or context.

(c) credit transfer: this, an inevitable consequence of a combination of modularisation and the delivery of some material from a distance, then becomes the means by which pupils are able to move from one institution to another, or from home to institution. As I noted earlier, credit transfer does not necessarily involve distance learning at all, though in many cases it does do so because it is distance learning that has led the development of courses in modular form or because students want to be able to complete parts of courses without leaving home or giving up work.

Distance learning is, in fact, simply a delivery method, though a somewhat specialised one. At one extreme it is a means for delivering a course conventionally taught on a face-to-face basis; at the other, its methodology is built in from the outset. Examples of the former include the 'A' level courses delivered for decades now through Wolsey Hall and the Rapid Results College in England and the degree courses of universities like Mysore and Madurai in India which were, in the 1970s, reaching tens of thousands of students who took exactly the same degree examination as those who were taught conventionally within the university's classrooms. I still remember the consternation among lecturers at Mysore when it transpired that the most impressive performance in the year's BA in English had been put up by a student who had never set foot on the campus!

At the other extreme are those courses written specifically to be delivered mainly at a distance, often through multi-media packages like those of the UK Open University, and other more recent institutions modelled on it (while noting that even OU courses usually include some element of face-to-face teaching in them). These involve video, television, audiotapes and sound broadcasts, text, prescribed books, summer schools, interactive telephone tuition, monitored marking by post, and combinations of them. Between the two lie a range of variations, all based on modules of work created to meet defined objectives, all susceptible to an evaluation process that enables third parties to judge the extent to which they can be equated with one another and ultimately put together like building blocks to construct a qualification that is the sum of the elements.

I suggest, therefore, that this Conference needs to focus, not on how distance learning can be used to teach language, or what the role of language is in the distance learning process, but on when and how the distance mode becomes an appropriate teaching vehicle for any particular language course, and what the consequences will be of using it. I should like to examine the implications and limitations of this argument:

Cost: substantial claims have been made about the cheapness of the distance mode as a delivery mechanism, but most are based on the number of candidates enrolling, rather than on the number completing. The two are very different from each other, since distance learning as a unitary delivery mode tends to have a very high drop-out rate. A fair assessment of the true cost of distance learning can only be based on completion rates, which are sometimes not significantly cheaper per unit than courses taught face-to-face.

Staffing: in circumstances where there is a teacher shortage and where there is a demand that far exceeds the capacity of the system to provide enough teachers to satisfy the demand, there is a strong case for using, in part or in full, the distance mode, even if it is a relatively expensive solution to the problem, There was such a need in the newly independent Zimbabwe, where substantial numbers of teachers were trained using distance methods, and is certainly the case in contemporary China, where the huge demand for English teachers is largely unmet.

Infrastructure: the use of the distance mode is virtually useless if there is no infrastructural support. Since the distance mode is merely a delivery system, it is about as useful - or useless - as carpentry lessons in a classroom that possesses no workbenches or tools, if it lacks suitable support systems. The uplands of education are littered with the wrecks of distance learning initiatives that stalled for lack of suitable back-up support. An integrated package of materials, tutors, feedback and other forms of support is essential.

I should like to develop this last point first: over the years I have been approached on occasions by broadcasters with proposals to develop what are usually quite expensive packages of English language teaching for global use. As a direct consequence of one such approach, the ODA commissioned, in 1989, a research study by Ken Cripwell and Charlotte Creed of the University of London Institute of Education, to examine the prerequisites for the use of radio and television broadcasting for the teaching of English.

The Cripwell Report comes down unambiguously on the side of locally designed, country-specific materials supported by a properly structured support system of local tuition, whether through the written word or through face-to-face teaching. It stresses the unlikelihood that a series of broadcasts on their own, particularly if they do not grow organically from the environment, will be cost-effective in their outreach.

This is well illustrated by the ODA-funded initiative in Namibia last year, where the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation, in conjunction with the BBC, produced a series of locally written and recorded English lessons aimed at improving the speaking and listening skills of Namibian primary and secondary school teachers, ensuring that the speakers were Namibians using local intonations

and speaking styles. These were supported by written materials distributed widely throughout the country. Even so, an evaluation by the British Council Director in Namibia reveals that there were difficulties; programmes were broadcast at inappropriate times; teachers were unable to hear or record them for technical reasons; some teachers considered the lessons too easy while others found them too difficult. The experiment was a moderate success in awareness heightening, but not an overwhelming one (see Annexe A).

I have to confess to being one of the only people to regard 'Follow me through English', as a poor vehicle for teaching the language. It is said to have been immeasurably successful in China, certainly if we evaluate its success in terms of the number of proposals of marriage received by its British female presenter! But I have not yet seen any objectively collected and compiled material that shows the extent to which this odd scrapbook of comedy sketches managed actually to teach people English that would stay with them, illuminate the workings and structure of the language, and enable them to use it purposefully. As a 'commercial' for English, the programmes may well have been a great success, but they had no infrastructure to support them, they provided no real grammatical insights, and - as far as I know - they contained no intrinsic evaluation process.

Let me work backwards to the second of my parameters: staffing. There are many instances where staffing is a problem, and where the introduction of a distance delivery mode may well be of use. The two English language programmes in Peru and Colombia, both supported by the ODA, suffer from problems of dissemination over a wide area. In Colombia in particular, there is a security problem that may well inhibit teachers from attending courses. Moreover, the intention of the project, which aims to effect a qualitative change in the initial Teacher Education Degree Programme in ELT, is to move outwards from the four universities initially involved in the project to a further 23 universities.

This again raises the question of the nature of distance learning: the Colombia project imitates one of the most successful of the ODA's English language projects over the years: the Federal Universities project in Brazil, where two TCOs, based mainly on the Catholic University of Sao Paolo, introduced and developed the study of applied linguistics with particular reference to the teaching of English throughout the twenty or so Federal Universities in the country. They did not accomplish this by the use of what would be regarded as conventional distance learning materials, but they nonetheless achieved their aims while operating at a considerable distance from most of the universities concerned by spreading a series of messages outwards from the centre to the periphery through a variety of techniques, including formal seminars, academic materials, and professional publications.

In other words, a logistical case can be made in many cases for an approach that multiplies - a favourite ODA word - by one means or another a technique, a methodology, or a course from a single centre to a range of outlying points, while reducing the need for multiple teachers at the centre to transmit the message. Where there is a shortage of teachers, a problem of communications over a distance, or a security problem, this may well be a methodology worth considering.

But this brings me to the first of my three considerations: cost. The Briggs Report quoted earlier, while going overboard for high technology, nevertheless acknowledged the significance of constrained resources. Cost-effectiveness has to be a major consideration, but it is certainly one that not all distance learning operations have properly considered. The development of satellite links, exciting as it may be, has to be carefully weighed against benefits. Technology is seductive, and it is not surprising that many distance learning enthusiasts focus on the technological possibilities inherent in teaching from very considerable distances.

But behind the technological 'fix' must lie the question of cost and convenience. The primary and secondary schools of the world are littered with television sets that do not work and teachers who do not know one side of a videotape from another. The short history of schools television broadcasting has as its recurrent theme programmes that nobody watched, and that nobody knew nobody was watching.

Teaching by satellite is a splendid innovation if it merits the huge opportunity cost of mounting it - and I do not mean just the cost of that particular broadcast, but the overall costs of installation, maintenance, rental, technician provision, and the creation of programmes to ensure that enough air time is used to make the operation cost-effective. It is easy to allow enthusiasm for techniques to overcome a cold assessment of the cost of alternative delivery techniques.

The same applies to the teaching of language, as I indicated above in relation to the need for infrastructure where it comes to broadcasting. Cost-effectiveness - unless there are overriding reasons for adopting the distance mode - is a priority consideration, since technology presents a substantial opportunity cost. In the last analysis, educational delivery, either in a distance mode or in a three-shift classroom, is about achieving economy, whether of scale, scarce human resources, or facilities. Cheap, effective, adaptable approaches involving a mixture of recipes are the most likely to be cost-effective.

One way of achieving cost-effectiveness is through economies of effort. When I joined the ODA, it used to pay for a post at the British Council whose function was to ensure that materials used in one part of the world were not reinvented like the proverbial wheel in another. I never saw any evidence that this objective was actually achieved - and indeed there was plenty of evidence that people around the world were producing parallel materials - but things have moved on in the past ten years, and it may well be that teachers are prepared increasingly to adopt each other's materials - and be willing to let others adopt theirs, which is another question altogether - as they become more accustomed to the idea of sharing material.

It seems to me that one major contribution which this Conference could make to language teaching would be agreement on a means by which you are able to pool resources, ideas and materials in a way that enables new projects to start on foundations laid by others, rather than at the first spadeful of earth hacked out of virgin turf.

This raises the issue of study skills and gateway courses. One of the ODA's early contributions to the Commonwealth of Learning was a research project commissioned from Charlotte Creed at Leeds University and Professor Badri Koul of the Indira Gandhi Open University, who were asked to examine the feasibility of developing 'off the shelf' materials which could be used, with suitable adaptations, by a whole range of institutions throughout the world as an induction or gateway course in English for Academic Purposes[2]. Given my view that broadcast materials produced for global use are potentially of little value, I should not have been surprised by the conclusions of the study: that such course materials need to be specific to individual institutions and courses, and that there is probably no single model that would serve as a common denominator for a range. Rather, training in language use and other aspects of materials development for course writers are seen as more important.

Perhaps a more practical approach is, as I suggested above, to take a course that has been created for a specific context and then ask in what other contexts it can be made to work and what needs to be done to make it do so. I know that Richard West of Manchester University will be glad to talk to you about his M.Ed course in TESOL which now has a proven track record over a range of institutions in different countries, and by a process of steady evolution and updating, provides a model that is adaptable for new cultural, linguistic and geographical contexts.

I should like to finish with a word of caution. While I have spoken with obvious approval of the idea of modularisation, of adaptation of material from one package to another, of the flexibility which credit transfer confers on the student, we should not overlook the question of quality. Can quality be maintained as you increasingly modularise and adapt courses? How do you achieve the integration that education should achieve if a student hops from module to module, from institution to institution, and ultimately from country to country?

Should distance education restrict itself to being merely part of a process that teaches specific skills, while acknowledging that it does not necessarily develop the education of the whole person?

Any study of the history of ideas shows how easily knowledge can be lost. There is a danger that modularisation, applied to education, can lead to a dilution of quality and a narrowing of the breadth that education should bring. Distance learning is at its best when it provides skills training, when it is the hors d'oeuvre that leads to the main course. As a means of providing study skills, of bringing a student up to speed in mathematics as the basis for a subsequent course in engineering, as a means of offering applied technical knowledge, of teaching a language (but not necessarily literature) it has a role to play.
Language teaching is very much a matter of developing particular skills. In its early stages, it is sufficiently about the application of rules and concepts to concrete situations to make it a suitable candidate for packaged or modular approaches to learning. In 1971, a number of us pioneered an English course at the British Council in Algiers that relied on the provision of off-the-shelf language laboratory materials combined with ad hoc tuition from the teacher's console to a range of learners from ministers to customs officials who acquired a passable working English through this method. I was privately amused to be shown just such a centre recently which its creator believed was his own particular brain-child.

But we need to be vigilant in ensuring that distance learning and modularisation do not run away with us. Though this is to restate the obvious, they are *apt* to appropriate contexts and ultimately someone has to take responsibility for the pupil's overall development. Without this, education may begin to take on the quality of an academic tour rather than a genuine adventure into lands of challenge and imagination. Teachers can be trained in the specific skills of English usage and teaching by pre-packaged courses; but ultimately teaching requires experience, wisdom, understanding, and the sensible application of skills to individuals, all of whom are different in their needs, levels of understanding and backgrounds. Somewhere, someone needs to remember this and to ensure that learning does not end up as the rote-learning of facts or mechanical skills that lead nowhere.

Roger Iredale

## References


1. Commonwealth Secretariat (1987), *Towards a Commonwealth of Learning, p.1.*

2. Creed C and Koul B N (1990), *Study of the Language Needs of Commonwealth Students studying at a Distance through the Medium of English,* unpublished report presented to the Commonwealth of Learning, British Council and ODA by the School of Education, University of Leeds.

Annexe A

# ENGLISH BY RADIO IN NAMIBIA- SUBSTANTIVE EVALUATION REPORT, December 1992

Of the three schools visited, two - *Versteende Woud* and *Eddie Bowe* - had not completed the course. Neither school had a radio or a tape-recorder or pre-recorded cassettes. Both said that the programmes conflicted with other school activities - sport was singled out - although the programmes were felt to be interesting and useful. Both felt that the Pronunciation segment caused them problems in that they did not always agree with the model presented. It was also felt that Group Leaders needed more training and that it would be preferable if non-teachers - eg Subject Advisers - could act as the 'instructor'.

The third school - *T H F Gaeb* - had not started on Book 2, but had recorded the programmes in readiness. Most comments were positive but reservations were made about the pronunciation component. Again, there was a request for a 'teacher' on the spot.

**South of Khorixas**

Of the three schools visited, none had completed the course. *Sorris Sorris* had listened to three Units before the radio broke down; *Uis Brandberg* had no groups at all as teachers refused to come after school on Monday evenings; and in *Omatjete Primary* groups had stopped meeting in July as no copies of Book 2 had been available.
Nevertheless, some interesting points were made. *Sorris Sorris* felt that even with three programmes, levels of English had improved. In particular, Vocabulary and English Practice components were helpful. The Pronunciation component had caused some problems because of the diversity of accents employed. *Uis Brandberg* felt that more teachers would attend if the course were made compulsory by the principal. Some teachers lived a distance from the school and found it difficult to attend. *Omatjete Primary* found the programmes useful, particularly the Vocabulary component but found the Pronunciation section problematic - it was not the pronunciation of the community. A further problem was that the Group Leader felt his own English was poor and that he therefore lacked credibility with the group. Again, teachers needed to be ordered to attend the course.

All three schools expressed the need for radios or tape-recorders as well as supplies of blank and/or pre-recorded cassettes. In addition, none of the schools had received copies of Book 2 in time for the broadcasts.

In Uis, contact was made with Mr Boois, who had been the trainer of Group Leaders. He is a full-time teacher and felt that a post should be created expressly for the purpose of follow-up, distributing books, and training. From his observations, teachers felt the programmes had helped, that their English was improving and that their confidence and motivation had increased. He agreed that all teachers felt that the Pronunciation component was a problem and that some kind of standard Namibian English was required.

**North of Khorixas**

All four schools visited had followed the programmes. *Fransfontein* felt teachers had improved quickly and wanted a more steeply graded course. It was suggested that a regular test Unit to monitor progress would be useful and that an overt Methodology component would increase motivation. *Anker* also felt the course had been beneficial and had no criticisms. *Erwee* said that radio reception was patchy and that pre-recorded cassettes would be preferable. The Pronunciation component had proved particularly helpful.

Jasper Utley

# THE LOGISTICS OF DISTANT LANGUAGE TEACHING

I learned to be sceptical about the value of distant language teaching over forty years ago. In 1953, I was visiting primary schools in Northern Nigeria to see the use to which English teaching by radio was being put in some of the few classrooms which had radio receivers. In one of them I saw small children imitating perfectly the received pronunciation of the radio teacher, only to be corrected in turn by their Nigerian teacher, who insisted on "correcting" their pronunciation and getting them to imitate his own impenetrable accent. Not only did this demonstrate the superior skills of children in language acquisition, but it also showed beyond any doubt the key role of the teacher where oral language skills are being taught by distance methods as a supplementary resource in the classroom. The experience has remained my reference point in all discussions of English language teaching by distance learning methods.

It can, however, be argued persuasively that in order to evaluate the potential of mass instructional methods, we cannot afford to concentrate on one particular situation. We are dealing in effect with a number of continua. The first of these is the continuum of school provision. We are all aware that in all developing countries there is a tremendous range of educational provision, even if we exclude the private provision which is generally available in the capital cities to the richer citizens and the international community. There are usually several first rate schools supplied by the state in the richer areas. The physical provision is sometimes the equal of, and occasionally superior to, similar schools in developed countries, and the teachers are usually the best qualified in the system. Such schools can easily be identified by the density of new cars clustered outside the school as the children leave at the end of the teaching day.

At the other end of the continuum are rural schools, usually of poor construction with a little crude furniture, and sometimes with no furniture; sometimes they have no windows and no teaching equipment other than cracked or pitted blackboards. It is by no means uncommon to find that the school buildings are no longer adequate for the growing numbers of children and that classes have to be taught under shade trees. In wet weather, teaching is hardly possible at all. Often children walk several miles in each direction to obtain this poor educational experience, mediated to them by unqualified, or poorly qualified teachers. Schools may be situated at all points of this continuum, the average varying from country to country. In general, however, there is a great preponderance of schools at the more deprived end of the scale.

The second continuum is a continuum of teaching ability. This ability is not necessarily identical with, but is closely related to, the amount of education and training of the teacher. In many countries the proportion of unqualified teachers, which had fallen during the sixties and seventies, has been rising again during the eighties and nineties as the population increases and the financial position of the countries declines. Chance factors, however, also come into play. When I was teaching at the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology at Zaria, during the 1950s, I was impressed by two students in successive years, whose English was remarkably fluent and with an accent which was so typically English that it seemed almost a parody. On enquiry, I discovered that they had both been taught in a remote bush school in the far north of the country where there just happened to be a primary school teacher who, because of his own education at the hands of a well-disposed expatriate family, was able to have a tremendous influence on the language acquisition of all those pupils who came within his care. One of the students subsequently used his language skills by becoming a successful politician, while the other entered the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation and became nationally known, particularly in news and current affairs programmes.

Having recognised the immense variety of schools and teachers in each country and the way in which countries differ from each other, it is still clear that there is an urgent need for distance learning programmes in English language throughout the world. As I have indicated above, my main interest is in developing countries and here the need is clearly immense. The following reasons may be regarded as particularly acute:

- in spite of the Jomtien Conference, emphasis on Education for All by the Year 2000, there are still many countries where, at the present time, less than half of primary children attend school. In Ethiopia, for example, 38% of children attend school, though in some parts of the country, the percentage is below double figures. Even in countries with a high primary school attendance rate, the quality of their educational experience may be poor. Kenya, for example, has enrolled 94% of its primary-age children in schools but 40% of primary teachers are unqualified. For this, and other reasons, only 38% of girls and 46% of boys complete the entire primary school programme. Throughout Africa, therefore, there are very large numbers of children who do not secure even a complete primary school education and whose educational deficits must be made good by some other way later in their lives. Moreover, for those in school, a distance learning component could hardly fail to enrich their learning;

- the birth-rate has still not steadied, let alone declined, in most developing countries. This is one reason why the per capita expenditure on schooling is falling in virtually every country in Africa and why the proportion of the age group in schools is also declining. It is difficult to envisage any likely change in this pattern though the impact of Aids, both on children's enrolment and on teacher supply is difficult to evaluate;

- many countries in Africa are in a precarious financial position. Structural readjustment programmes may, in the medium to long-term improve the economic position. In the short-term, however, there is little prospect of the decline in the percentage of GNP devoted to education being reversed;

- the consequence of all these factors is that many children are not accessing good quality primary education at all and that for many of those who do leave school without completing a full primary education programme, their only chance of acquiring the necessary language skills is by taking part in non-formal, including distance learning, education. The percentage of the adult population which will require non-formal educational provisional is also continuing to increase.

Taking into account the magnitude of the problem, one is driven to the conclusion that the needs cannot be met by traditional teaching methods, whether formal or non-formal. An entirely new approach has to be adopted. The only feasible available methodology is distance learning, though our knowledge of language teaching at a distance is barely adequate for our needs.

Moreover, the number of specialists in distance learning methodology currently available is tiny in proportion to demand. The number who have had experience in producing and directing successful programmes is even smaller. Consequently, the main difficulty in the great majority of countries that are most dependent upon distance learning solutions is the acute shortage of skilled personnel. It is one thing to be able to talk about strategies in distance learning, it is quite another to be able to sit down and give the extremely detailed assistance required to enable subject specialists to convey their expertise in an appropriate form.

In developing successful programmes, we need to be aware of the different situations in which such material may be used. In the first place, distance learning materials may be used to supplement teaching. In other situations, a variable amount of teaching may be provided to supplement the distance learning programme, while in others there may be no teaching input whatever, the whole programme being conveyed by distance learning. While some materials could be used in all three situations, it is clear that different approaches and packages would be needed for each of these situations.

Another major problem relates to the most desirable media for specific courses. Commercial correspondence courses have relied for the most part on the printed word, coupled with an efficient postal service and skilled in-house tutors. The British Open University model, which is an example

of a highly successful programme with relatively small dropout rates and a high success rate, has accustomed us to think of multi-media programmes including not only printed work and distance tutors but also support through radio and television and their accompanying recorded equivalents.

These programmes are also supported by residential courses, some of which, such as certain science programmes, are compulsory for all students. These techniques have been adopted by a number of programmes in other countries that have also used satellite technology in order to increase the market. New media are also becoming available with an apparently unlimited potential for distance education, for example CD ROM, computer-assisted learning and interactive video programmes.

The fact remains, however, that for most of the potential users of distance education, advanced technologies are virtually inapplicable. Even in those countries that have used them, questions arise as to whether the money would not be better spent on increasing the users of the system, rather than on providing high-cost resources for a small fraction of those who need to learn. This implies that the solutions we are seeking should depend on low-cost techniques as much as possible and especially on printed materials. Indeed, even with printed materials, choices may have to be made between varieties of programme with different costs. An inevitable trade-off has to be made between spreading distance learning packages of lower quality around a much greater market and making programmes with a high success rate and a high cost available to a smaller proportion of the population. Such decisions may vary according to the nature of the audience and whether it is indeed a mass audience or a select audience to which particular programmes are directed.

We must also differentiate between various legitimate purposes for distance learning. The one which tends to be uppermost in our minds is the purpose of making education available to students for whom there are insufficient teachers or for whom teachers cannot be afforded under a traditional system. A second purpose is to provide additional tools to teachers who are inadequately trained and who cannot teach at the required standard. A third is to extend the provision of learning to a very much larger number of people who are not registered students but who 'overhear' the studies provided for others. With some programmes (eg those in primary health care), the existence of the larger audience may make audio or video programme transmissions cost-effective, which would not be cost-effective if they were being provided only for registered students. Similarly, the provision of written or cassette-recorded materials to schools for class use by inadequately trained teachers may make the production of such materials financially viable where that would not be the case if one were only costing the provision of totally distance education programmes.

It is necessary, therefore, in considering distance education in any particular situation, to provide a total strategy wherever this is possible, rather than a partial and narrowly focused one.

What students appreciate in distance learning programmes, in helping them to learn successfully, are:

1. regular assignments which are rapidly marked and returned to the student. These help to maintain commitment, allow students to diagnose and monitor their own progress, and take some pressure off the final examination. The continuous assessment element is regarded by most students as of the utmost importance;

2. support from locally based tutors is also greatly valued where this can be organised. This, of course, can be a costly benefit unless a substantial number of students are grouped together;

3. residential schools are regarded as being of great importance. These need not be of great length and should be directed where necessary to those aspects of the programme which it is difficult to undertake at home. Residential courses at the beginning of each unit are of particular value;

4. student self-help groups can also be of great assistance. It is difficult to organise these, however, without central support, since individual students are unlikely to know which other individuals near them are undertaking the same studies in the same subjects at the same time. Such groups, however, are very highly motivating and are a low cost means of providing remedial help. Central assistance may also be required to locate suitable premises for self-help groups if none of the homes of the participants are suitable for informal meetings.

Language suffers from some of the same problems as science teaching by distance learning methods. Perhaps it is largely for that reason that we have acquired less experience in these areas than in other subjects. Just as it is essential for a scientist to have laboratory practice under skilled supervision, so some areas of language instruction can be best undertaken in a tutorial or workshop situation. This is especially the case in a second language situation where the models of language available both in the community and from classroom teachers may be detrimental to the learner. Even in the case of the teaching of French in primary schools in Britain, where corruption by inadequate second language speakers is not a problem, direct language teaching through unsuitably prepared teachers proved to be an inadequate way of teaching the language. Moreover, language skills, whether those of the learners or of their teachers, require constant refreshment if they are not to deteriorate.

As in most distance education, it is desirable to target programmes as precisely as possible. In many countries, such as Namibia, it is teachers who are in greatest need of help so that they might, in turn, mediate their knowledge to their pupils. As in all successful skill teaching, it is desirable to use a competency-based technique. The first step in an improvement programme for teachers would be to analyse the language skills required for primary teachers at each level of instruction, bearing in mind the class books, if any, currently being used in schools. The knowledge and skills required would then be placed in hierarchical order and dealt with in discreet but ordered programmes which might be taught with varying degrees of support. Each package should have a pre-test and a post-test: at the start of each package, the learners would be tested to see whether or not they already have competence in the contents of that package. If they had, they would then move on to the next package without receiving the earlier one until they reached a point at which substantial deficits began to occur. At this point, the teaching would start. It should be noted, however, that the teachers may already have the skills taught in later packages in which case they would not need to receive further instruction in them. After each successful testing, whether with or without the learning package, the appropriate competence would be marked in the competency grid ('passport') possessed by each teacher. It is hoped that when the entire course had been completed for any given level of teaching, the teacher would receive a certificate together with some small salary increment.

The advantage of such a programme is that it can be taught efficiently with only those parts of the course being taught which each individual teacher specifically needs. Moreover, the support and face-to-face teaching for each component, where this is available, could be undertaken by specialist teams at weekend courses or during vacation periods. The face-to-face support for different packages could be allocated to different groups, including NGOS, for different sections of the work and for students living in different regional areas. Such a programme could be economical and effective if the necessary preliminary analysis is well conducted and if the administration of the programme is efficient. In comparison with the normal 'blunderbuss' approach to nation-wide language improvement, this might well prove successful and cost-effective. Certainly, every programme as it is put in place must at least aim at the greatest amount of instructive support that can be achieved. In summary, I believe that the following guidelines should inform all our work in distance education:

1. even where there is abundant access to the media and sufficient technical assistance to maintain the equipment required, a minimalist approach should nevertheless be maintained. Only those media which are absolutely essential for the success of a programme should be

used. There is no country that is so rich that it can afford to waste scarce resources. Where a very large increment of cost is necessary to provide a very small increment of knowledge or skill, the necessity of that increment should be closely studied;

2. there should be a realistic attempt to evaluate the existing resources of the country in terms of the technical infrastructure. If the postal system is totally unreliable, alternative means must be found of distributing course materials. If radio transmission is poor, it is impossible to rely on audio assistance as an integral part of the programmes though it may be used for purposes of enrichment. The same is true *a fortiori* for the visual media;

3. if it proves necessary to use audio cassettes as part of the programme, the repair facilities must be realistically surveyed. It may well prove necessary in some countries, to provide a central servicing facility as part of the distance learning infrastructure;

4. it is wasteful of effort if teachers and lecturers, however highly skilled, are asked to write distance learning materials, if they have not been specifically trained to understand the distinction between textbooks, lecture notes and distance learning materials. A high priority should therefore be given to the employment of distance learning specialists who can both train, and work with, subject specialists as they undertake their work;

5. there is no point in producing materials *de novo* if materials already exist which can be used without adaptation: there is no point even in adapting materials which are already completely adequate for the job. Similarly, there is no point in writing materials *de novo* if existing materials in another country can be effectively adapted. Different subject areas and indeed different topics within subjects have highly differentiated cultural loading and it is necessary to diagnose carefully the needs of each module;

6. proper attention should be paid to the learning needs specific to the job for which the students are being prepared. In particular where the courses are part of a teacher training or upgrading programme, only those aspects of the subject should be taught which are essential for the teachers to do their work. The principle of selectivity in subject matter is important in every subject in every country and too little attention is paid to the principles of such selectivity. What is relevant and what is irrelevant must be clearly distinguished from each other.

The guidelines mentioned above are by no means subject specific. There are in addition general organisational criteria which must be met whatever the subject, level and purpose of the teaching may be. Among these criteria are, for example:

1. political will; that is to say if the politicians, who for many jobs including teaching represent the employers, believe that distance education is an inferior form of learning, it is unlikely either that adequate financial provision will be made or that the motivation for securing sound learning exists;

2. the availability of recurrent resources is of the greatest importance. Nothing is more dismal than for students to embark on a course which cannot be continued because of lack of finance. This implies that self-sustainability should be built into the programme so that it does not remain a constant drain on the education budget;

3. immaculate administration is an essential prerequisite of success in distance learning. Great care must therefore be taken in the design of headquarters and regional offices and in the choice of hard and software needs;

4. training of all those involved in the distance education programme is absolutely essential. Even those who are well prepared in distance education technology (almost no such people

exist in most countries) will still need specific training in the aims and administrative patterns of each specific course which is established;

5. all part-time tutors, most of whom will also be full-time teachers or lecturers should be adequately renumerated for the extra effort which they put into the programme. Without this the programme will fail;

6. quality assurance mechanisms must be built into the system. The work of every tutor/marker must be regularly and randomly evaluated, as should all other aspects of the programme such as the continued writing of new materials which takes place and the efficiency of the record maintenance.

At the beginning of this paper, I expressed concern about the poor and deteriorating position of primary education in most countries in Africa and have come to the conclusion that for many people there will be no alternative to non-formal and especially distance education if the aims of Jomtien are to be realised. This gives a special urgency to the solution of the many problems in the training of teachers of English in all those countries in which English is an important means of entry into the modern sector. Improvement and greater accessibility of English teaching is not just an issue of improving knowledge and skills but also has important applications for the creation of equal opportunities for all.

John D Turner

# THE OPEN UNIVERSITY AND LANGUAGE ISSUES

## Introduction

The Open University has become increasingly concerned with language issues in the last few years for two principal reasons. One of these is the increasing variety of English language backgrounds of our students, affecting their study of courses across the whole curriculum range. The other is our recent decision to embark on the teaching of modern foreign languages, requiring us to tackle a number of new challenges.

My task this morning is to give you something of a context for the more focused sessions this afternoon. In this short space of time, I shall try and give you a picture of a large and complex institution, with a distinctive mission and style. Books have been written describing the OU and it would be both impossible and inappropriate to try to convey the totality. I shall concentrate on the really important features from a language perspective.

What I have to say will come in two parts. The first is the general OU context, and the second is a first look at some more specific language issues, which my colleagues will say much more about later on.

## 1. The Open University Context

Five features stand out. These are:

the distinctive mission that has characterised the University from the start
the sheer scale on which it operates
its particular style of distance learning
the nature of its curriculum
its developing international role

### (a) Mission

The OU was founded with the aim of being open as to people, as to places, open as to methods and open as to ideas. It is open as to people in the sense that it has no entry requirements to most of its courses, so that anyone can come and try their hand at OU study. If this approach is not to lead to a lot of disappointed and demoralised people, good advice is essential, and we try to provide this. In the end, the students are adults and make their own decisions. Students come from an enormous range of educational and cultural backgrounds into our system. Many of them need a great deal of language support, access to diagnostic materials, advice on preparation, and so on. Given this support, many succeed and far more than would have thought themselves capable of study at this level. It is open as to places in the sense that people do not have to go to any particular location in order to study. They can study at home, on the train, in their lunch hours at work, or anywhere that is convenient. They will only be expected to have access to such equipment as most people have, such as a television, and increasingly a video recorder. It is open as to methods and ideas in that it continually strives to innovate. The introduction of French to the curriculum has called, and is calling, for just such an approach.

### (b) Scale

The sheer scale of the University is often a great surprise to those who do not know it well. It is extremely large. Within the UK, there are about 80,000 students studying for undergraduate degrees at the moment, and about 40,000 students studying for various postgraduate and professional qualifications, or simply because of personal interest in one or more courses. These numbers are expected to increase every year. We have also had a limited number of schemes for students outside the UK for many years, notably with the Forces in Germany and Cyprus, and with the Benelux

countries, with study centres in Brussels and The Hague. During 1991 significant additional groups of students embarked on study with us. For the first time, admission to OU courses became available throughout the European Community, and was no longer restricted to those with access to special schemes. Austria and Switzerland are now also included. Special schemes now exist in Hungary, Slovakia and Russia as well. Thus, there are already substantial numbers of non-UK students and we expect these numbers to grow significantly over the next few years. You will all be particularly interested in the international aspect of this, and in our wider international activities.

**(c) National and increasingly international**

The OU has students studying from their homes or workplaces all over the EC and substantial parts of Eastern Europe. They are all using basically the same materials, and most of them are studying through the medium of English. This creates some challenges, both for them and for us. It is certainly an area where the British Council and the OU may be able to work together in a complementary way, and we will be monitoring our pilot scheme with you in Lisbon with great interest. The exceptions to the pattern of studying in English are students in Hungary, Slovakia and Russia, where Know-How funds have facilitated the translation of the course materials into the local languages.

Outside Europe there are many other international links. We are part of a world-wide network of distance teaching universities, and have particularly close associations with the Indira Gandhi National Open University in India, the Allama Iqbal Open University in Pakistan, and the several Australian universities involved in distance education. We have a partnership with the Open Learning Institute in Hong Kong, where our courses are offered to the Institute's students under their own local arrangements. We have a different partnership, just getting under way, with the Singapore Institute of Management, where students study our courses and obtain OU qualifications as a result. All this is part of an evolving pattern as we seek to find ways of extending educational opportunities wherever they are needed and we have something of quality to offer.

**(d) Distance learning, OU-style**

So how is all this teaching done? There are two strands that interrelate, but can be looked at separately. One is the set of multimedia course materials, and the other is the local support of students both in personal terms and through the mediation of course materials by tutorial staff.

The materials are prepared centrally, at the University's headquarters in Milton Keynes. A course team with a varied mix of skills comes together for a period of intensive work in order to create the materials. A typical course will have a substantial amount of printed material, and some audio visual elements in the form of radio and television broadcasts and/or audio and video-cassettes. There is a substantial OU/BBC production facility on the campus, where the audio-visual material is prepared. Some courses will also have software, and some will have home experiment kits with which students carry out some simple scientific experiments at home. Both the software and the kits will be prepared in on-campus facilities, or commissioned by them, so there is always scope for interaction between the course components at all stages. On the course team will be people with expertise in the use of the different media, both on their own and in various combinations, and academics with expertise in the subject matter to be covered. There will also be an editor, whose job it is to make the printed material as clear and intelligible as possible. Not all academics write fluent and student-friendly course material, and the editor plays a crucial role here. When students are studying independently for most of the time, and have no opportunity to ask questions of the author, it is especially important to do all you can to maximise the clarity of expression, and ensure that the logic of the arguments being explained is transparent. This is even more crucial when the student's grasp of English is not particularly good.

The course team also has responsibility for assessment materials. Students are expected to undertake continuous assessment tasks throughout their period of study, as well as taking a final examination in most courses. The assessment materials must also be carefully prepared, and are usually edited for the same reasons as the course materials, namely clarity and lack of ambiguity.

When the materials are prepared, and the assessment in place, the other strand of the OU becomes key. The materials may be prepared at a distance, and reach students through their letter boxes or television screens, but they have access to locally organised support. In the UK this is provided through 13 regional centres, including one in each of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. These regions recruit and manage a large number of tutorial and counselling staff, whose job it is to look after students in various ways. They also maintain a network of study centres, often using schools and other educational premises for this. Here the students can meet with each other, and with tutors and counsellors. The tutor's main role is to mark the work of about 20 - 25 students, and help them with difficulties they may be having with the course material or assessment, either during face-to-face tutorial sessions, over the phone, or by correspondence. Counsellors provide more general support in such circumstances as illness, bereavement, or any other eventualities which may affect a student's studies temporarily, and where they need help with using the OU's systems for dealing with such matters. Local support of this kind has proved enormously valuable in the UK, but it is not an easy model to replicate world-wide, and a great deal of thought has gone into the provision of services outside the UK, as we inevitably expand in this direction.

What we have done so far is to establish a small number of study centres in Western Europe, and agents to manage the processes for us in the early stages, under the auspices of our Newcastle Regional Centre. The only exception is the Irish Republic, where the student support is overseen by our Northern Ireland Centre in Belfast. In Eastern Europe and Russia, our courses are offered through a local institution, and they are responsible for such support as is provided. At the moment there is only a limited number of courses on offer in these countries, all in the area of management. In Singapore and Hong Kong, it is again a system of local providers using our materials under clearly specified arrangements. In both these cases, a wide curriculum choice is on offer.

The University offers an extensive curriculum by these means. It has five Faculties - Arts, Science, Social Sciences, Maths, and Technology - and three Schools - Education, Management and Health, Welfare and Community Education. Between them, they offer a programme of 150 or so courses, which students may take individually on a one-off basis, or cumulatively towards an undergraduate degree, taught higher degree, diploma or certificate. We are working towards adding Modern Languages to this, and will launch our first French course at the beginning of 1995. The issues surrounding this will be of obvious interest to you.

**B Language issues**

I shall briefly explore five themes:

Language support for students across the curriculum
Exploiting various media, both singly and in combination
The mediating role of the course tutor, and assessment strategies.
Preparing to teach French, OU-style
The English Language as a curriculum topic in its own right.

**(a) Language support across the curriculum**

The University needs to address the English Language difficulties experienced by three distinct categories of students. One category is students whose first language is English, but who encounter problems with using it in an academic context. A second category is students who are resident in the UK but who describe themselves as bilingual or multi- lingual, or whose dialect of spoken and

written English differs markedly from the forms of English used in our course materials. The third group is students for whom English is quite clearly their second language, including many of our current non-UK European students.

We have no definitive overall solution to the challenges this poses, but are pursuing initiatives on a number of fronts. I have singled out five for special mention.

The **Open English** project is my working title for an initiative that may, in the end, be called something quite different, though the aims will not change. It is to be a workbook which students may use at any stage of their study, though it will come into use naturally in a student's OU studies. It can be seen as a parallel venture to our Good Study Guide, which helps students hone their study skills. It will focus on the content areas of arts and social sciences, and will help students develop skills in the three main types of writing needed in their academic work - description, narrative, and argument. The skills will be explained and there will be plenty of practical exercises and short writing tasks.

**A register of tutorial and counselling staff** with particular expertise is a second idea being explored. This would be a development of the local support which I mentioned earlier, and would provide scope for a referral system to be operated, particularly in a large urban area where there would be a natural concentration of such staff.

A third possibility might be to develop some **self-diagnostic tools** which students could make particular use of before their studies actually begin. If the self-diagnosis were to indicate the need for some language development, students could be pointed in the direction of the 'Open English' workbook, or provision available elsewhere.

A facility already in place, and which could be extended, is the Technology Faculty's **'Plain English'** book, with the express aim of enabling students to write a lucid technical report.

The final possibility would be for the University itself to offer **EFL/ESL courses**. There is clearly a need amongst actual and potential students world-wide for such materials: we are also well aware that there is a great deal of such provision around, not least that offered under the auspices of the British Council. Provision of our own is therefore an open question for us.

**(b) Use of Media, singly or in combination**

Each of the different media has strengths and weaknesses from a teaching and learning point of view. The successful course puts them all together in such a way as to draw upon these varying strengths and avoid their weaknesses. Television and video can supply excellent case study and resource material, and audio tape is ideal for listening to conversations. Print is probably the best medium for setting out sustained argument. From the point of view of language, the audio visual media provides opportunities for contextualised listening, and the printed texts are all about reading.

However thinking of each medium separately is unnecessarily restrictive. They can be judiciously combined in ways that ensure that the whole is much greater than the sum of the parts. This applies across the whole curriculum, but certainly to the language dimension of it, whether or not language is the subject in itself. One example of this would be when a concept is explored in a variety of different ways. Watching and listening to an exploration of a topic on a television programme or video cassette obviously provides opportunities for language development in itself: where the same topic is treated on audio tape or radio, and in print as well, students with different backgrounds and styles of learning can latch on to the medium that comes most easily, and be enriched by using the others. Deliberate combinations of media are also invaluable both for general learning purposes and for language development. Students can be talked through an argument they are simultaneously reading, so they hear the words spoken whilst reading them.

It is undoubtedly the case that we will make more and more conscious use of media, both singly and in combination, in support of students' language needs. The potential is clear and I anticipate some exciting developments as we experiment and evaluate over the next few years.

**(c) Course Tutor as mediator**

I mentioned earlier that there were two key strands to the University's teaching - the preparation of multi-media materials and the provision of local support. The course tutor is a crucial part of this support. He or she will be the student's most significant personal contact with us for the duration of the particular course, and play a vital part in customising our offerings for individual students. We are working on ways of strengthening the support they can give on the language side.

A tutor can **direct students towards diagnostic and support materials**, negotiating with each individual student as to whether this is appropriate, and which materials would be best. Such materials are built into the planning of our French programme, and are under active discussion for students studying more generally, through such projects as **'Open English'**.

A tutor can do a great deal through the **assessment process**. They expect to provide extensive comments on students' written work and there are obvious opportunities here. Over the phone, and in face-to-face tutorial sessions, they can clarify all manner of misunderstandings, provide alternative explanations of ideas, and paraphrase elements of written and spoken materials. This provides **opportunities for two-way oral communication** between student and tutor and, of course, between student and student as well. Tutors will encourage students to interact with each other much more extensively than formal opportunities allow, and the 'self-help' group is an important element in the studies of many students.

As well as mediating the course materials for the benefit of individual students, tutors provide all manner of **feedback** through various channels to the regional centres and the course team responsible for the materials. Regional centres and course teams can respond to this as they review local support arrangements and the materials from year to year, and language issues can be, and often are, a feature of this process.

**(d) Preparing to teach French**

It took us a long time to convince ourselves that it was even possible to teach foreign languages at a distance; now the challenge has been grasped we are facing up to some very key questions.

One of these challenges has been to identify **appropriate entry and exit levels**. In the end, we have related these to national curriculum and language lead analyses as the most useful set of benchmarks. This being done, it becomes very important to enable students to judge whether they are already at a level that will enable them to study the first course, or whether its sequel would be more appropriate, or whether they need to engage in some serious preparation first. To facilitate this, we are developing a set of diagnostic tools, and a means of referring students to appropriate preparatory materials where this is necessary. We are collaborating in a quite significant way with the BBC on this, as there seems to be quite a natural ladder of progression from their French courses to ours.

The big question for a distance education provider such as the OU is of course the provision of **opportunities for oral work**. Reading, writing and listening are all feasible at a distance, but providing the opportunity to engage in spontaneous conversation is much more problematic. We are dealing with this partly through enhanced tutorial support, but also by making clear to students just what they can reasonably expect to gain from their studies. In the second and subsequent courses, we will build in intensive residential weeks in French, which will help to meet this need.

An additional question we have also had to address is whether the OU can do something distinctively different that really **adds value** to what is already available elsewhere. The fact that our students have been clamouring for us to offer languages for years is a good indication that we probably can add such value. Progress so far on our first course reinforces this view.

The final, and obvious question, is **why French, and not .....?** For us, student demand was the deciding factor, and French was what they wanted most when we embarked on this enterprise. German and Spanish are increasingly in demand, and we are actively considering those in the medium term. The other pressure is of course to teach English ourselves, as I mentioned earlier.

**(e) A course called 'The English Language'**

This is the final important initiative. The OU has long had courses that include the study of language in its profile, largely emanating from the School of Education, and with an educational focus. A new course in preparation focuses completely on this, as its title suggests.

It has a number of themes, notably English as a language of education, teaching English as a second language, variation and diversity within English, and the relationship between English and other languages. We see it as an important addition to our profile of courses, as it will complement both our foreign language provision, and our offerings in the humanities and social sciences areas.

**Conclusion**

All in all, the Open University has an increasing interest in language issues. It is actively developing language support across its curriculum, and extensively exploiting its multi media strategy in the process. It is preparing to teach modern foreign languages, and to teach about English itself. The aim is to exploit its unique combination of centrally produced, high quality materials, and provision of local support to mediate these. Its experience so far has identified many issues which will be of wider concern, and we shall look to share our experiences as they develop.

Ann Floyd

# LANGUAGE ISSUES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION AT TERTIARY LEVEL

I begin this session with some questions of definition: about what might be distinctive about 'Tertiary Level' as opposed to other levels and phases of education; about what is to be understood by 'Distance Education' ; and finally, about what is to be included within the definition of 'language' for the purposes of this discussion.

## TERTIARY LEVEL

There are many ways in which educational practices and experience at tertiary level are no different from those at other levels, and I do not wish to make out a strong case for its distinctiveness. Nevertheless, tertiary level can be distinguished from secondary and primary in many contexts in terms of the students, nature of materials/subject matter, and pedagogy.

### Students

One of the problems facing distance (and other) educators in present times is knowing how to refer to their students. Are they to be regarded as 'students'? (which emphasises an expectation that the institution will determine the nature of courses and methods of teaching). Are they to be referred to as 'learners'? (which emphasises the students', rather than the teachers' role). Or are they to be regarded as 'customers', 'clients' or some other term drawn from the lexicon of market discourse? (which emphasises the rights of the students to determine both content and pedagogy of courses). I propose that, within the tertiary sector at least, we maintain the traditional term 'student', whilst recognising the need to be responsive to the needs of desires of people wishing to enrol on our courses. My own feeling is that distance education is now sufficiently driven by economic and other market factors for there to be no need to further emphasise this aspect of the enterprise.

The student body at university level has traditionally been composed almost entirely of school leavers, with the homogeneity of age and social experience which that implies. The Open University, (and more recently conventional institutions in the west), caters for a much more diverse student body. Our students include both school leavers and those who have retired from full time work. They differ greatly in social, work, and educational experience. They may take our courses for leisure, out of a need to know more about a subject, or more instrumentally for career advancement. Despite this diversity, they share a commitment and motivation which many traditional universities envy. Catering for such diversity requires non-traditional techniques of course design, as I will discuss more fully below.

### The materials and course content

I think there are certain trends visible in the stages of transition from elementary to tertiary phases of education. One is about language: primary education tends to be in local, vernacular language. Secondary education may be in a regional or national language. Tertiary education is typically in an international and highly standardised language - often, of course, English. This reflects the extent to which the kind of knowledge and relevant text books are available only in international languages. Even if it were thought desirable to translate scientific materials into a local language, that language is unlikely to have the required linguistic resources.

There are other trends in language across the phases of education: the language of primary schools is primarily oral. As we move to Higher Education, the language (even spoken language) becomes more literate. This is because writing, as a rhetorical mode, is the way the more objective, decontextualised, abstract knowledge characteristic of tertiary level, is linguistically coded in English. Many students experience difficulty with this transition.

**Pedagogy**

Despite the easy going and liberal appearance of progressive primary schooling, there is a deeply rooted authoritarianism about the forms of knowledge exchanged there. Young children are expected to enter knowledge systems which are provided by the teacher and school and which cannot be negotiated. At the other end of the educational system, there is an expectation (nowadays) that the curriculum is more negotiable; and that this curriculum will include a learning of the principles by which knowledge is created and can be contested.

Hence one feature of tertiary education is the way students are typically repositioned as potential knowledge creators rather than mere consumers and reproducers. In order to take up this position, students need to enter the discursive community of a discipline: to learn appropriate forms of argument, knowledge, representation and display. This involves the command not just of a single language register, but a repertoire. Students need to know how to talk informally about a subject as well as write scholarly articles. More problematically, they need to know how to write a student essay appropriately in their chosen subject, despite the fact that suitable models of this genre are not provided by the teaching materials.

The design and use of materials in tertiary education reflect the status of knowledge. Students are typically encouraged to read a range of books and scholarly articles which take issue with each other's theories and points of view. They are encouraged to enter this ongoing conversation and intellectual debate.

**Distance education**

There is no simple definition of distance education, but rather a range of different practices, contexts and purposes. A number of characteristics have, however, become associated with distance education:

Remoteness (in space and time) of a student from the teacher;
Isolation of the student from other learners;
The use of non-face-to-face modes of communication, particularly print media;
An expected autonomy or independence of the learner;
Large scale operation;
Complex multi-media production with associated high development costs
Low unit costs, because of economy of scale.

The important feature of such points is that they can all be contested. There are many counter examples even within the Open University - such as low volume, low resource short courses. The Open University also places great store on student self-help and support groups, tutor student interaction, and residential schools. Conventional teaching institutions are also increasingly employing some of the above strategies to cope with deteriorating staffing ratios and resources. It is increasingly difficult to locate a clear boundary between what is 'distance education' and what is not.

**Language Issues**

I suggest that we need to define language issues in broad terms when dealing with multi media materials. In addition to a rather narrow definition of linguistic competence, there are wider issues of communicative competence. Are students familiar with the particular discourses, conventions of genre, rhetorical structure and so on which are required by the discipline being studied? Further, have they been inducted into the special discourses and *media* discourses of distance study? What of the broader cultural literacy which their reading requires: the knowledge of specific other texts, of social institutions and social life which are required before texts are comprehensible?

In addition to this wider view of verbal language, there are important conventions of non-verbal communication, ignorance of which may be an obstacle for the distance student. Such non-linguistic semiotic systems include elements of page design, visual representation, and conventions of media texts - film editing, camera work and so on. Some of these are specific to particular distance education programmes, others wider culturally located practices.

Lastly, with the definition of language one might want to include the social practices which occur around texts and which give texts specific kinds of cultural meaning in different communities. What is the attitude to different kinds of print? How, and where is reading carried out? In the West, for example, the kinds of TV literacy which students typically bring to their study are those more suited to the consumption of TV for entertainment. Watching TV is frequently a social activity, watched with friends or other members of the family; conversation frequently occurs around TV; the careful attention and consideration which is given to print may not be bestowed upon TV or video.

Lastly, we must not imagine that language issues in distance education revolve only around study of the pedagogic materials. At the Open University, students make contact with a variety of people, in a diversity of ways, connected with their study of courses. Some of these are listed below:

***Communication contacts for students:***

- Local tutor;
- Other students;
- Members of the family and friends with whom course material and experiences are discussed;
- Counsellors and advisors dealing with study problems, career decisions and so on;
- Regional Centre, Staff Tutor, enquiries;
- Central Administration at Milton Keynes, including Finance Office (fees, etc); Assignment Handling; Student Records (registration, academic progress); Exams Office (appeals, timetabling of exams etc); Correspondence Services (non or faulty delivery of materials);
- Central course team (some students routinely manage to enter into telephone or correspondence contact with central academic staff).

***Forms of communication with students:***

- Forms of all kinds;
- Brochures and prospectuses;
- Leaflets;
- Newspapers;
- Postcards;
- Letters;
- TV and radio announcements;
- Telephone;
- Audio-cassette;
- Formal and informal face-to-face;
- Computer mediated communication (conferencing, E-mail).

David Graddol

The following is a summary of one of the four workshops provided by the Open University team. This is followed by a brief account of the others by the rapporteur of the session.

# TEXTUAL STRATEGIES FOR DIVERSE AUDIENCES

### The Closed Text

Conventional wisdom concerning the design of course materials for distance education suggests that they should take account of 'where the student is' (be learner centred, be clear and explicit, contain regular signposting, summaries and so on; engage the learner with activities and self-assessment questions for which model or indicative answers are provided). In other words, texts should be designed such that their meanings are unambiguous. A variety of strategies are employed to ensure that each student is able to recover that meaning.

Such strategies are also embedded within the total delivery system: feedback loops are created by assignments, tutor mediation, residential schools and so on to ensure that students do not stray from the right path or that those who do are nudged back to the straight and narrow. Audio-visual materials are used to approach the same ideas and issues from a variety of different perspectives, providing redundancy.

The texts which adopt such a strategy I refer to as 'closed texts'. They are intended to speak with a single voice; to control stage by stage the state of knowledge of the learner; and to ensure that all students obtain similar experiences and understandings as a result of enrolling on a particular course.

### Difficulties in controlling the meanings of texts

Such perfectly closed texts cannot actually be achieved in either theory or practice, (though that does not prevent people from trying). The idea that any text can be constructed in a way which guarantees the nature of the understanding reached by a student is extremely suspect. For example, we can note the factors which influence the understanding of instructional texts:

- Prior subject knowledge;
- General world knowledge (cognitive schemas, scripts etc);
- Linguistic competence in narrow sense;
- Knowledge of other semiotic codes;
- Ideological and cultural values and assumptions;
- Prior educational experience and expectations about the nature of learning;
- Knowledge of specific other texts (eg the Bible, literature etc) which allow metaphors, similes and allusions to be understood;
- Familiarity with genre, rhetorical structure;
- Mediation by local tutor;
- Discussion with other students;
- Assignments and assessment.

**Diversity of audience**

In the Open University, students have unpredictable states of prior knowledge; within a modular degree programme, they may move from virtually any course to any other; they may have followed courses at other institutions earlier in their lives; they come with a variety of work experience. In addition, they enter courses with a wide variety of social and world experience - their ages are diverse, as are their cultural backgrounds and the value systems they bring to their study. All these factors affect the way meaning is taken from texts. But such meaning is typically also socially negotiated through discussion with others and via the mediation of the local tutor. Lastly, a student's choice of assignment can significantly structure their studies and understanding of materials.

There is a further diversity insofar as students are not the only audience for whom texts are created. First and foremost, texts are created for an author's immediate colleagues on a course team. This is true of any collaborative publication. Bell, 1991, for example, illustrates how newspaper journalists need to design copy for the sub editor rather than general reader. Failure to do so means that a story will not be published at all. In the case of course teams, copy must be accepted by colleagues. True, such colleagues will in part, be drawing on institutionalised and more personal ideas as to what students require, but the course team nevertheless represents the first audience for course material.

There is also a wider professional audience. Quite legitimately, authors must ensure the academic respectability of course material both for their own interest and in order to maintain the reputation of the course for students. A tension arises between the needs of this wider academic audience and enrolled students if authors feel unable to make certain ideas appear too simple. There may also be a need to ensure that the components of the course which are publicly visible, reveal at a glance the underlying academic logic and coverage. Without taking such considerations into account when designing materials, a course may gain an unfair reputation for being unbalanced or poorly organised.

Lastly, there exists general audience for some course materials. Collections of articles need to be commercially viable and that means ensuring they meet the needs of students on other courses; broadcast television programmes must be engaging and comprehensible to those not studying the course. In this way, the high costs of such broadcasts can be justified by their general educational value; by their ability to promote the reputation and awareness of the Open University to employers and other family members; and by their direct advertising potential for recruiting new students.
Why closed texts are impossible

**Why closed texts are impossible**

A distance education text, such as those produced by the Open University, speaks with many voices. There exist the obvious voices - of quotations, of set readings, of local tutors, of course team authors. In addition, there exists the heteroglossia which necessarily arises from collaborative production and the use of multiple sources; comments and suggestions made by the course team, pilot testers, critical readers, external assessors must be taken account of or adopted by the main author; subsequent editing introduces another person's rephrasings and revisions; use of audio-visual materials produced by teams within the BBC or graphics studio insert further voices which may not be completely compatible with that of the original author.

Such heteroglossia leads to a variety of perspectives, and ways of representing knowledge being offered to the student. Each will be taken up in different ways by different students. Necessarily, there will emerge inconsistencies, paradoxes, and parallel voices. Open University instructional texts marshall and attempt to exploit these different voices in different ways and with different degrees of success.

**An Open Textual Strategy**

An open text is one in which different readers are encouraged to arrive at different readings. The justification for attempting to construct such texts deliberately derives from the fact that, with diverse audiences, no text is as closed as is sometimes imagined anyway, and we might as well do what we do by design and with better understanding.

One important feature of Open University texts is the narrative structure which contextualises different voices. There is the administrative voice which guides the student through the material (now read this, now do the activity, now complete the assignment). Close to this level of narration is the teaching voice which summarises and evaluates different readings, quotations and so on. Anything stated at this level of narration takes on high factual status and as a consequence authors must act responsibly when writing in this voice. In the MA course, *Language and Literacy in social context*, which I have just completed writing, we have allowed individual course team members to take up a variety of other voices: they may direct students from their teaching voice to an article (by themselves) written in a more formal academic register. Such readings are at narrative level at which claims can be safely disputed and evaluated. An author in his or her teaching voice may even distance themselves from what they assert in their own article. In addition to these voices, authors speak informally on an audio-cassette. External authors of set books and articles are also interviewed and speak informally about their work.

Such narrative structure allows order - to some extent - to be imposed on the heteroglossia whilst still allowing students to take up their own positions.

A second design feature of open texts is that they are created to be read at different levels. For example, in this text I have referred to 'voices' in a way which I hope will make sense to a wide range of readers. Those who come to this text with prior familiarity with the ideas of Bakhtin are likely to mobilise this knowledge and make more specific and richer readings of the text. Others may recognise the model of learning I am drawing on here as a dialogic one and relate it to concepts from Vygotsky (on the one hand) or (given the likely audience here) practitioners such as Freire. The general point is that intertextuality does not need to be made explicit (as I have now done). Ideas can be introduced and described in ways which makes sense for those with different kinds of prior knowledge. As soon as a technical term appears (*heteroglossia)*, a potential anxiety is also introduced. When particular authors are cited (Bakhtin, Vygotsky), less knowledgeable readers are not necessarily helped. Rather, their lack of understanding is merely drawn attention to. Designers of open texts need to take special care in deciding what concepts should be established as part of the explicit curriculum, and what will be referred to in ways which invisibly mobilise the intertextual experience of certain readers.

The controlled use of intertextual knowledge may seem an arcane textual strategy, but it is a necessary consequence of the way Open University materials are designed for non-student audiences. Increasingly, we cannot make explicit reference within one component of our course material to other components which an external user may not have access to. For example, the TV programme *Face to Face* formed a part of the course *Communication and Education* and deals with non-verbal communication. It is designed to stand alone, but it follows closely the structure of a chapter in the set book *Describing Language*, which is also available independently. Our own students, who first read the book, bring this knowledge to the TV programme, and in that way, derive a richer understanding of it. In this way, the course creates its own intertextuality. It is then a relatively small step for the course team to provide for further kinds of differential states of knowledge amongst their own students.

David Graddol, Open University

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## RAPPORTEUR'S SUMMARY

The Open University's session on the Tertiary Sector dispersed into four discussion groups which then reported back to the whole group.

The first discussion group, on 'Textual strategies for diverse audiences', concentrated on an examination of the tone and register of OU materials, and the context is given above. The increasing importance of heteroglossia, the move from a single authorial voice to multiple voices, was emphasised. There was general agreement that the role of the traditional lecture had perhaps been undervalued, that both lecturers and learners seemed to like the lecture format.

The second group looked at 'Access and language support'. In common with other universities around the world, the OU is looking at ways of increasing access to tertiary education via some kind of preparatory or foundation bridging programme. Problems were noted with accreditation for these preparatory courses. Government scepticism was also noted. Concern was expressed about levels of language competence on entry to OU courses and the perception in some quarters that standards appear to be lower than ten years ago. Possible explanations lie in different teaching methods in schools and in the amount of written work now demanded of school learners. The traditional lecture was cited as a useful role model as an initiation into appropriate academic register.

The third group looked at 'assessment and monitoring' under seven headings.

(1) The tension between pedagogic and assessment needs and strategies, particularly in view of the cultural diversity of students. Courses and procedures need to be flexible and responsive to the needs of students. The Singapore programme, for example, has introduced a weekly face-to-face lecture in response to student demand.

(2) The need for standardisation of assessment criteria, and for those criteria to be in the public domain.

(3) The need for awareness of diverse cultural, linguistic and subject knowledge backgrounds among students.

(4) The tension between different varieties of English, particularly in non-print materials.

(5) Awareness of academic genres and conventions, including issues such as plagiarism and discourse structures.

(6) The need for security in assessment, and the establishment of credibility in the eyes of key stakeholders such as government and employers.

(7) The need to take access and equal opportunities issues into account.

The fourth group looked at 'Language teaching at a distance'. Two problems in particular were identified. The first was the difficulty of providing opportunity for speaking and the associated problems of assessing speaking ability. Home audio-recording had not been successful (too many technical problems) and the general group feeling was that the testing and learning of spoken interaction was always going to be a major problem for distance language learning. The second issue concerned problems of production, particularly the interaction between the programme writers and the film director.

David Hall

# IN-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING: THE ROTARY FOUNDATION LITRAID PROJECT IN ZIMBABWE

Primary and secondary education in Zimbabwe expanded rapidly during the years following independence in 1980. One feature of this expansion was that many of the better qualified teachers in Zimbabwe's primary schools were attracted into posts in the newly created secondary schools, leaving the primary schools with large numbers of unqualified or poorly qualified teachers. These teachers employed extremely traditional teaching techniques in the classroom, and neglected the teaching of reading. They had, over a period of time, unwittingly developed highly ritualised methods of teaching and this was exemplified by the poor nature of the classroom communication and instruction in the pilot video of the Litraid Project.

This pilot video shows a teacher teaching a reading comprehension lesson. The teacher was nominated by a regional director as one of the best teachers in the region, but his comprehension lesson reveals a highly ritualised form of teaching, dealing hardly at all with the problems of comprehension. During the course of the lesson, he humiliates pupils for no more reason than that they had failed to follow the ritual form required for answering questions. One of the major objectives of the main project is to create better communication in the classroom.

The LITRAID Project began as a pilot project under the 'matching grant scheme' of the Rotary Foundation in 1987. It established four Regional Centres in Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru and Mutare, using the Open University as its model. The pilot project successfully delivered one block of study material and a corresponding instructional video over a period of two months to seventy teachers. The study material used was the Open University's Language Course PE232, Block 5, 'Understanding Classroom Discourse'. The pilot project was evaluated by Dr Richard Walker of Queensland, Australia, who rated it highly successful. As a result of this evaluation and the full support of the Ministry of Education and Culture of Zimbabwe, the Rotary Foundation agreed to fund the production of a full in-service distance education course similar to those produced at the Open University and, with the assistance of the staff from the Open University. A grant of US$300 000 was awarded.

The complete course consists of five units, each accompanied by a video. Units 1 and 3 deal with interaction, Unit 1 starting with interaction in the traditional Zimbabwe society. The video shows traditional learning activities in rural society: children learning various skills in the village, yoking oxen, making pots, and learning the rules of life. It demonstrates that, in Zimbabwean society, children can speak to uncles or aunts or grandparents and suggests that the teacher should alter his/her role from that of father/mother to one of uncle/aunt whenever this is appropriate. The objectives of this first video are:

- to offer an understanding of traditional education and to suggest ways in which the principles of traditional education can be adapted for use in the classroom.

The video for Unit 3 deals with interactive learning, and shows a teacher using various interactive activities with a class in a school. These activities are designed to offer an introduction to role play and simulation. They are introduced at the non-verbal end of a cline which concludes with the highly sophisticated language skills involved in simulations.

The video for Unit 2 deals with interactive reading. It demonstrates, amongst other things, the nature and complexity of the skills which operate during the reading of a literary passage by a group of university students. The video for Unit 4 deals with genres and varieties of text, and the theme of Unit 5 bears on text development in Zimbabwe. It traces the research thrust of the project, giving ideas for the classroom of the future. Valerie Timmis of the Open University produced and directed the videos and trained a video production team made up entirely of Zimbabweans during

the development phase of the project. Counterpart blocks corresponding to each of these have now been written by a course team. These are being edited by John Pettitt of the Open University who is on secondment to the LITRAID Project. The blocks are being evaluated by Dr Neil Mercer of the School of Education of the Open University.

Tutorial study of the units will take place at the four teachers' regional centres mentioned earlier. Students living within 30 km of them will be expected to travel to the centres for tutorials on three Saturdays per month. The centres are open at weekends and other times so that teachers can watch the videos together or individually when they visit the town. For teachers further away, the project has a landrover equipped with a video and generator, which visits schools on a regular schedule and shows the videos. The landrover is driven by a tutor who works with the teachers.

Some heads have complained that the new methods being introduced create excessive noise in the classroom. The project insists that at least four teachers in any school must register to participate in the project, so that lone teachers are not overwhelmed by the old system during their course of study or after they have completed the programme. Some teachers on the pilot project had undertaken in-service training of other staff in their schools at the request of the headmaster. Although the course has not as yet been accredited for University purposes, the University of Zimbabwe has just established a Centre for Distance Education which will take responsibility for the course and the Ministry of Education has offered teachers one salary increment for the successful completion of the course. Assessment is by means of write-ups by the participants of improved classroom practice. There will be an examination which participants will write at the end of the course.

The Rotary Foundation's involvement in the course will terminate at the end of 1994 and the Ministry of Education will take over the administration of the course in 1995.

Bill Louw (Presenter)
Richard Trewby (Rapporteur)

# TEACHER EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT: A VIEW FROM A DISTANCE

This session focused mainly on distance learning issues in language teaching education. Inside this frame, language issues in distance education were highlighted as they arose.

After some introductory comments, the first part of the presentation put forward arguments concerning a potential relationship between distance learning and teacher education. The second part indicated how one particular course, Aston University's MSc in Teaching English, attempts to realise this potential.

### Introductory comments

There is no attempt here to make universally valid generalisations about distance learning, or to work towards any kind of definition of what distance learning is. The presentation is made from the perspective of one specific attempt to help course participants reach their educational goals; in this attempt, most of the learning and teaching takes place at a distance.

From the perspective of this experience, while it is disappointing to have education itself referred to in terms of the old container/transmission metaphor, the relevant emotion is more akin to despair when one hears distance education described as 'merely a delivery system'.

Similarly, while one can understand the circumstances which led an earlier speaker to refer to distance education as better than nothing in desperate circumstances, it is inevitably to the continuing detriment of distance education to have it so described, when the description might be misunderstood as being of general relevance.

The attitudinal tone of this presentation is celebratory. Distance learning and teacher education involve mutually supportive processes towards mutually coherent ends (Richards 1991b): participants increase their awareness of the contexts in which they live, they increase their potential for making autonomous meaning in those contexts, and they increase their control over their contexts - a complex of outcomes which Paul (1990) refers to as 'self-actualisation'.

This works at many levels. Following an Open University Course, for instance, can lead a person to recognise time spent doing the ironing as a good time for listening to study cassettes. Working on the Personality Development component may lead a person to use an infant daughter as an important informant for academic research. Studying the Enlightenment may bring a different understanding of the attack on fundamental cultural values implied by the threats, reported perhaps dismissively in the daily newspaper, to the life of a novelist. It is easy to say that this awareness raising can take place through traditional education, but distance education not only makes the experience available to a new community of learners, it brings the process into the learner's home environment.

The session then moved on to an unpacking of its title.

### Teacher education

It can be useful to think of teacher education as made up of the twin elements of **Training** and **Development** (eg Freeman 1992), where training refers to technical, professional, or project-oriented learning, while development is seen as person-oriented, helping an individual grow towards their own potential. Useful as this analysis is for purposes of reflection, we must also seek in our lives to work for a fusion of the two. The fusion is what is being referred to here as **Empowerment**, where individuals are helped to become increasingly aware of themselves in their own context, both of themselves as a person and as a professional.

The term is used in this sense here, in full knowledge of its use by others whose more-or-less overt project is the de-skilling of teachers and the centralisation of educational power (see, for example, Smyth 1989 or any statement by Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Education at the time of writing).

**Empowerment**

Empowerment is a complex term which, again for the purposes of reflection and discussion, can be considered from three perspectives, in terms of increasing authority, ability and responsibility.

**Authority:** As a person becomes empowered, they extend their range of authority, perhaps officially by gaining promotion, interpersonally in that they behave with a greater sense of sureness, or internally, in that they simply feel more confident.

**Ability:** Empowerment involves increasing one's skills and abilities - becoming able and feeling ready to take on more authority and responsibility.

**Responsibility:** One needs to be ready to take responsibility for one's actions and for their outcomes. This responsibility becomes greater as authority and ability increase. At the same time, the taking on of more responsibility needs to be done in such a way that it will not threaten those who are in authority.

This last point emphasises the overlap between a discussion of empowerment and a discussion of other types of innovation: it is often unwise to confront those in power. Their engagement is greatly preferable if one's purposes are evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

At this point, the session shifted into a presentation of how Aston University's distance-taught MSc in Teaching English seeks to facilitate the above kind of empowerment through teacher education.

**Aims of the Aston MSc in Teaching English**

**Professional development:** in the senses of the individual's professionalism and also the contribution of empowered individuals to the development of the profession.

**Local development** is brought about by helping participants deepen their understanding of the situation in which they are working. Inquiry is set in the context of the participant's own practice. Here there are echoes of 'theorising from the classroom' (Ramani 1987), 'teachers theorising their practice (Smyth 1989) and 'reclaiming our own theory' (Naidu et al 1992), where teachers empower themselves through a process beginning from a description of their own work.

**Co-operative development** refers to the building of co-operation between teachers as they develop the discourse with which they describe and then shape their practice.

**How the programme works**

**DL Materials**
Individuals receive course components in the form of ring-bound files. The files contain textual input, individual and group tasks, and reference material. Video material is also available at the Local Resource Centre.

**Local Resource Centre**
An LRC is established before the course begins. There are currently LRCs in UK, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Abu Dhabi, Malaysia and Japan. LRCs are located in places where there is already a library which can be supplemented, library staff where possible, and a readily accessible facility open at weekends. This has so far meant either a British Council Centre or a co-operating university.

**Local Group**
The course is open to groups of 10-15 from one of the countries where there is a local centre. Although it would be possible for someone from the group to elect to work alone, the course is not open to individuals where no centre is available. If a group from a country where there is not a local centre expresses interest, there is the chance that a new local centre could be started. Group meetings are voluntary, but those who attend find the support helps counter the emotional isolation of the distance course, as well as providing an intellectually stimulating forum for individual and co-operative development.

**Course Tutor**
Each group has a Tutor, located in Aston, who has teaching duties, as well as acting as a mediator between the participants, other colleagues, and the university. Participants and tutor communicate via post, fax, E-mail or telephone. It is important to note, especially when discussion focuses on the 'delivery' of distance education, that communication is frequently initiated by participants. The tutor also makes regular visits to the local centre to run workshops.

**Support**
The provision of multiple support systems is taken very seriously. An introductory workshop is run so that the tutor has a 'face' and becomes a real person for the participant to correspond with. Responses to affective concerns are built into the design of the course and there is a conscious attempt to compensate for the emotional stress a distance course may generate.

**Visits**
As well as the initial/introductory visit and subsequent visits by the tutor, subject specialists visit LCRs, especially in support of components assessed by examination, as these can generate high stress.

**Newsletters**
These are written individually by tutors for their groups and go out approximately every two weeks, with information, news and general interest items to keep the contact open.

**Bulletins**
These are published twice yearly, providing a forum for participants to publish their work. Help is given in producing the register necessary for academic writing and participants are encouraged to publish in journals.

**Study Companion**
This provides an overview of all components of the course, and a breakdown of what they contain, along with a description of the assignments to be completed. Reading lists are also included. This gives participants the chance to read ahead and plan their study - also the chance to shift focus if they have had enough of what they are studying in detail at any one time.

**Course Guide**
This provides an administrative overview of the course, eg the dates of examinations and when assignments are due, as well as relevant university regulations and a guide to academic writing conventions.

**Course Structure**
The course is offered in two variants: MSc in Teaching English OR MSc in Teaching English for Specific Purposes. Each group opts for the variant which members want and they receive appropriate materials. Two units are sent out concurrently until the dissertation phase.

The course is arranged in five phases and two strands: pedagogic and linguistic. The linguistic strand is evaluated by examination, while the pedagogic strand is evaluated by assignment based on action research in context.

**Course Structure**

| Linguistic | Pedagogic |
|---|---|
| 1 Text and Discourse Analysis | Methodology |
| 2 Linguistic Varieties | Course and Syllabus Design |
| (EXAMS) | |
| 3 | Materials Analysis and Production |
| | Options:<br>Currently: Management of ELT; Business English; Classroom Research; Self-Access and Distance Learning; Teacher Developement; CALL; Computational Linguistics |
| (End of diploma phase) | |
| 4 Descriptions of Modern English Lexical Studies | |
| (EXAMS) | |
| 5 Dissertation | |

**Discussion**

There were comments on the nature of feedback from the tutor on written work. Feedback can be viewed as 'written teaching'. One effective method tried and popular with course members is where a brief written overview is given accompanied by an audio cassette on which more detailed comment is made. This satisfied two potentially conflicting needs - the academic institution's requirement for documentation and the human need for personal and developmental support.

The course begins in January and ends in November of the second year. Initially two components are sent out and then the next two before the first assignment is due.

Graduates report greatly varying amounts of time spent studying, from a minimum average of eight hours a week, to a maximum of 20.

If additional resources are needed, participants have full use of Aston's library and inter-library services, but this involves expense and careful planning ahead.

Particularly at the dissertation stage, there is the danger that a course member might have problems tracking down resources when pursuing a line of thought in great detail. Tutors would advise on this, but not actively limit choice of topic on these grounds. Comments from the Open University representative showed that the OU insists course members complete assignments and dissertation ONLY from materials provided. This is done to ensure the course can be completed by anyone receiving the material. Aston's position is that the assignments and dissertation formats provide a framework, but that it is the participants' concerns which must make up the content. This should not be more constrained than is absolutely necessary. Lack of reference material is more an (understandably) perceived problem than a crucial one.

A question was asked as to whether the Distance dissertations were not of a lower standard ('impoverished') as a result of the potential shortage of material. On the contrary, the UK dissertations suffer from being removed from the context of the practice they refer to. The distance element has a positive, enriching immediacy. UK based participants were far more likely to need actively discouraging from a decontextualised dependency on repetitive reference to the literature, rather than drawing on their experiences.

Reference was made to the methodology of the course. If the course is advocating a reflexive approach, then the tutor needs to be seen to be practising this. If participants are expected to theorise from their own practise, then the tutors, too, need to carry out investigations into the nature of distance learning as a teaching method. An example was given of investigating ways of giving feedback on written assignments, where the tutor put himself into the vulnerable position of asking for feedback on the feedback modes. By opening up, showing that the interaction is a dynamic one, the tutor enters into the spirit of development, which is the essence of the course philosophy.

Throughout the session, inspiration was drawn from the Shona proverb provided by Moses Mukabeta and Bill Louw (see this volume):

*'Your feet will get you somewhere, but your backside won't.'*

With this in mind, we covered some distance.

Julian Edge (Presenter)
Melanie Ellis (Rapporteur)

# MAURITIUS COLLEGE OF THE AIR

**The context**

As Media Adviser to the Mauritius College of the Air, Mike Smith summarised his brief as that of Media 'blanket-bombing' to encourage and promote the use of the English language in Mauritius, targeting:

- the education system (from primary school to university);

- public service (eg in agricultural extension work);

- the general public.

Thus, the expectation is that a video commissioned for use in, say, the secondary schools will also have a 'market' amongst not only the private lessons constituency but that individual learners will wish to acquire it for use in the home. The problem with this expectation - which is political/ administrative rather than educational in origin - is that objectives become unrealistically diffuse and the current top priority is to secure agreement to more restricted targeting in terms of both constituency and learning objectives.

**The Mauritius Movie: why use video?**

The scene having been set, 'The Mauritius Movie' was screened. Prior to viewing, participants were asked to write three things they knew about Mauritius; while watching, three things they did not know or found surprising; and after watching, the three images that had made most impact. Following the viewing, participants were invited to compare the 'new or surprising' items with the 'high impact' image items, and the argument was addressed that the higher the congruence between the items noted, the more effective the video as a teaching/learning experience. That is, selection of (or investment in) video as the chosen medium for an educational purpose is justifiable over less expensive methods only if it meets three criteria:

- that it **adds** to 'knowledge';

- that the visual images are **memorable**;

- that the **images** provide the link between the known and the new.

**Values and objectives: sources of conflict**

The specific brief for the post of Media Adviser was then related to the Media Project Strategy Document (1991): in particular, the conflicting demands created by , on the one hand, two sets of **values** (production/medium as against pedagogic) and, on the other, two sets of **objectives** (content/ information as opposed to language). The context within which these conflicts need to be resolved has features of both strength and weakness. The financial, political and educational commitment to the MCA - of sufficiently long standing in the College to have acquired national prestige - is a patent strength: but it is not always matched by a sympathetic appreciation of the professional and technical expertise that are essential to achieve the desired objectives. And the national reputation leads to expectations from other areas of the public service (eg in agricultural extension on health education) in which the conflicts alluded to above can be seen at work. The group tasks were designed, indeed, to exemplify these conflicts and to explore possible approaches to the reconciliation of seemingly incompatible objectives.

**Case studies: tasks**

There were four tasks, one located in each of the MCA constituencies as follows:

| Constituency | Topic |
|---|---|
| Professional | In-service teacher training |
| Schools | ELT across the curriculum (Forests) |
| Schools | English grammar (the future) |
| General public (formed) | De-rocking |

The task-groups were themselves microcosms of the distance-education process, in that their instructions were transmitted in a 'package' with music and data and they worked - even if within the same building - at a distance from the 'teacher'. The time spent on interpreting the instructions and re-defining the objectives exemplified what emerged as a common conclusion about the need for unambiguous guidance on procedure and objectives: one group, for example, reporting their feeling that they had discussed the brief rather than completed the task. (If this result was planned, it was effective: if not, then a happy coincidence!)

**Discussion I: establishing priorities**

In the post task discussion, apart from unanimity on the need in distance education materials for clarity of task-specification, the area of clearest consensus was that the effectiveness of video material is directly correlated to the specificity of the audience and of the objectives. Only if these are specific can decisions be made on forms - eg forms as image but also form of information- structure. In the absence of pedagogically-driven decisions on form, production-values (the 'pretty picture' syndrome) will inevitably prevail. This was exemplified by the De-rocking video in which, the Group felt, the 'message' required greater focus and restatement and that the "moving picture" would need supplementation by alternative graphics. In the ELT/Forestry video, the group felt that the producers were not sure whether their objective was a 'forestry' objective or an 'English' objective: an English objective can be serviced through the topic of 'forests' and a forestry objective can be serviced through the medium of English: **but ambiguity about objectives is fatal to effectiveness**. This conclusion self-evidently supports the Media Adviser's priority of refining targeting.

The outcome of the Group Tasks, if re-expressed as a set of recommendations for the use of video on distance education, might be:

1. the target audience must be rigorously defined;
2. the objectives must be realistic/attainable;
3. the pedagogic objectives must be served by the producers and not subordinate to production values;
4. the rubric in instructions for viewers must be simple and unambiguous.

**Discussion II: promoting media services**

A subordinate objective for the Task Groups was to suggest ways in which the services of MCA might be more effectively promoted to extant and potential constituencies. The discussion came up with various possibilities, such as standard promotional/advertising procedures via radio, TV and newspaper; and others more innovative/imaginative such as promo-trailers attached to commercial entertainment videos available from video shops (home video being relatively widespread in Mauritius and not available only to a wealthy elite). Nonetheless it was felt that the sub-task itself

was symptomatic of the problem of unrealistic expectations. The combination of professional responsibilities - as ELT adviser and as media adviser - of themselves generate potential conflict in terms of objectives. Responsibility for the promotion of MCA activities and products ought purposely to be located elsewhere.

Mike Smith (Presenter)
Jim Morrison (Rapporteur)

# DISTANCE LEARNING FOR NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

## 1. Introduction: a Clarification of Terms

Literacy education by correspondence quite rightly seems to be a contradiction in concepts. Yet, for many, nonformal education is thought to consist mainly of adult literacy classes and distance education is dominated by correspondence courses. So how can distance education make a significant contribution to nonformal education? The purpose of my presentation is to suggest that it can and to explore some of the ways and circumstances in which this can be achieved. But let us first clear away the misconceptions with which I started.

**What is nonformal education** - other than a rather unsatisfactory phrase? Most people correctly see it primarily as adult basic education. This does include adult literacy and in this way is concerned with language issues, but it also includes such things as health education, agricultural education, basic skills training and community education. It is concerned with organised learning whose primary objective is not examinations, which does not necessarily follow school curricula and which often takes place outside and independent of the traditional institutions of education. It is concerned with life improvement rather than qualifications. Most of my examples in this paper will be drawn from this kind of education. But it also covers a wide range of learning aimed at people whose education is beyond the basic. It has included, in the past, for example, education aimed to facilitate Sweden's decision many decades ago to change from driving on the left to driving on the right - and that particular example used distance education! My own examples will also include an English language course for Namibian teachers, which is not aimed at an examination. So nonformal education can cover a wide range of subjects and levels.

**What is distance education?** - It also is an unsatisfactory phrase, but one we appear to be stuck with at least for the time being. When the IEC started in 1971, we talked about 'three-way teaching' - a combination of correspondence courses, educational broadcasting and occasional face-to-face tuition. In the 1970s our sister organisation, the National Extension College, invented 'flexi-study'. The Open University popularised the phrase'open learning', which might eventually oust distance education though it is at present largely limited to the UK in its popularity. All these phrases are in my opinion preferable ways of describing what this seminar is about to distance education because they stress flexibility, the extension and opening up of education rather than the distance between teachers and learners; they put emphasis on purpose rather than on technology. So today I wish to avoid purism and pedantry in my interpretation of distance education in the examples I use to point to the conclusions I hope we will draw. In fact, some people may wish to query whether these are examples of distance education at all.

**What will the presentation consist of?** I must point out that I am not primarily concentrating on language issues in this paper. However, insofar as nonformal education includes language issues, they are also raised in what follows. First I will present three case studies: a functional literacy project in Ghana, a functional education project for rural areas in Pakistan and the English language programme for teachers in Namibia to which I referred earlier. Two of these specifically are concerned with language teaching. In the first two, we will look at videos about the project and I will summarise some conclusions from recent evaluations. In the last, we will listen to a radio programme and consider evidence of the results. Finally, I will round off the presentation by inviting you to discuss four questions, which I see as central issues in an examination of the potential of distance education for nonformal education.

## 2. 'Breaking the Culture of Silence': Ghana's National Functional Literacy Campaigns

**Background:** Ghana had run quite large-scale adult literacy campaigns both before Independence in 1957 and in the Nkrumah era of the 1960s. But disillusionment with Nkrumah led also to

widespread disillusionment with literacy, community development and adult nonformal education in the 1970s and 1980s. Evidence suggests that many lapsed back into illiteracy in the absence of reading material, and that adult illiteracy grew. When Gerry Rawlings came to power, the cry for mass education regained popularity. This was reinforced by the World Bank's belief in literacy as a prerequisite for development and by its enforcement of economic readjustment policies in return for loans. When recognition dawned that readjustment to Reaganite/Thatcherite economics could lead to social disaster and starvation in rural areas, the concept of PASCAD dawned (programme of actions to mitigate the social costs of adjustment!) and the Ghana government skilfully enlisted international donor agency support for its national literacy plans, as an essential element in its drive for economic recovery. Distance education techniques - or at least the use of radio - became incorporated in these plans almost by accident. Ghana's literacy campaigns are being conducted in 15 Ghanaian languages. Primers, radio programmes and post-literacy materials also therefore have to be written and produced and supervised in all these languages.

**Assessment of the campaigns so far:** A recent IEC/Ministry of Education review of the ODA pilot project support programme concluded that, while enormous logistical problems remain in the path of achieving large-scale improvements in adult literacy coverage, great strides had been made in creating motivation, providing primers, organising classes and making large numbers of people literate. It recognised the important role that radio had played in the mobilisation of support for the literacy classes and in promoting the functional themes of the campaigns, but it also recognised the limited contribution it had made to the actual learning taking place in class and the difficulty in measuring its overall impact on the levels of literacy achieved in those areas where radio coverage was available. In its proposals for improvement the review laid stress on the need for organised post-literacy activities and urged the wider use of rural newspapers as well as specially-developed post-literacy readers as the basis for organised reading clubs, and post-literacy learning forums. It suggested radio could and should also play a more direct 'teaching' role in such forums. In these ways, it suggested that distance education methods could play vital roles in mobilisation, promotion of functional themes and, especially, in providing the basis for post-literacy activities.

### 3. 'Functional Education for Rural Areas': Low cost, appropriate media for basic function education in Pakistan.

**Background:** The Allama Iqbal Open University of Pakistan is an Open University - or indeed any kind of University - with a difference. It has, since its foundation as the People's Open University during the elder Bhutto's regime, had a commitment to provide education for the "uplift of the rural masses", most of whom remain illiterate. So it has sought to develop programmes to cater for illiterate and newly-literate adults. The ODA, early in AIOU's history, undertook to support an action research experiment, and establish effective distance education methodologies to provide functional education for the predominantly illiterate adults in village communities. In order to do so, the project recognised the need to find out what the rural masses needed for their educational uplift. Hence it developed (and retains) a commitment to social research as an essential part of the project at all stages - needs assessment, materials development and testing, evaluation and replication.

**Outcomes and Critique:** Evaluation studies both internal and external, at the end of the pilot project in 1985 and 1986 assessed that the methodologies developed were effective and should be replicated on the same model in other parts of the country as a permanent programme of the university. The programme has continued in this form under the management of the University's Bureau of University Extension and Social Programmes from 1985 to date. A more recent evaluation, while stressing that the methodology continues to provide effective learning at pre-literacy level, points out that these methods continue to be used on a very limited scale, failing to achieve the economies of scale of which distance education is supposed to be capable. It again proposes, as did the 1985 evaluation that, for its programmes to have a major impact, AIOU must find ways of working together with the major national extension and nonformal education agencies.

## 4. 'Let's Speak English': a radio-led English language communication course for primary school teachers in Namibia

When Namibia achieved independence in 1990, the new government moved to implement the language policy worked out in exile, and endorsed by all the major political forces in the country. This was to make English the country's national language and to introduce it as the language of instruction from primary grade 4 onwards. But most primary school teachers in Namibia had very poor communication skills in English. The Ministry of Education invited the ODA to support an 'English by Radio' project to help alleviate this problem. A series of workshops were run jointly by the Ministry, with the support of the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation and the IEC, with the support of BBC's 'English by Radio and Television' Department. A course was planned, written and produced consisting of a year's worth of weekly radio programmes, and two accompanying self-study textbooks. It was planned and organised that these materials would predominantly be used in study groups of teachers meeting regularly in their own communities, assisted by selected and trained group leaders. The course was first offered in 1992, on its completion, and is again being run in 1993.

**Assessment and Critique:** Unfortunately, the IEC was not allowed to carry out a detailed evaluation study of the project, on the grounds that, having been involved in setting the project up, it would be incapable of setting up an objective evaluation. As a result, no detailed evaluation has been published, though an initial evaluation was carried out by the British Council in Namibia. (Initial hearsay results of this evaluation suggest that quite large numbers used the course in one form or another - though many had difficulty systematically following the radio programmes, and the study groups were spasmodic or non-existent. It is hoped that a more detailed and up-to-date assessment can be given in discussion.)

## 5. Key Issues

The following questions seem to me to be key issues. What can we conclude from these case studies by way of guidance in answering them?

(a) Does distance education have a role to play (i) in literacy and numeracy education and (ii) in adult basic and nonformal education more generally? If so, what?

(b) What methods and media of distance education are appropriate for adult basic and nonformal education? What are the essential elements for success and effectiveness?

(c) How can programmes be organised which extend these approaches to "the masses" and thereby realise economies of scale and mass impact?

(d) In what ways, if at all, do distance education methods lend themselves particularly well to nonformal language teaching?

Tony Dodds

# RAPPORTEUR'S SUMMARY

Comment and discussion focused on aspects of the case studies, all of which clearly demonstrated the potential of the approaches adopted, and on aspects of the key issues identified in Section 5 of the Paper.

## 1. The Case Studies

The Ghanaian PAMSCAD literacy programme was seen as being associated with certain specific social and environmental developments; literacy groups were, for example, often mobilised to undertake specific social and environmental projects. However, the precise nature of the links between the distance learning approaches adopted, ie the use of local FM radio and local newspapers, and improved literacy levels on the one hand, or more general socio-cultural changes on the other, were difficult to establish. In some respects (for example, improved income-earning capacity or health improvements, or population control), it was felt unlikely that there was any substantive link or effect at all. This said, though, the distance learning methods employed were critically important in that they provided the means for developing an awareness of literacy and the functional themes of the campaign, and they stimulated interest and participation in the programme. Their effect appeared to be sufficiently positive as to justify fully their use in other, comparable situations.

Discussion also focused on the position and role of women in the literacy campaign, both as managers and teachers and as recipients of training. As providers, women were in a minority, men being the main facilitators of the programme at its various levels, including the teaching level. As learners, however, women were very much in the majority.

The issue of 'sustainable' literacy was a recurrent theme in the paper and in subsequent discussion, in that without sufficient post-initial literacy support, basic literacy falters and can be lost. This aspect was felt not to have been given sufficient attention in the campaign and, now, a key question must be: 'What do the several hundred thousand Ghanaians - mainly women - who have become literate, read in order to ensure they can get the practice necessary for them to retain and develop their hard-won basic reading skills?' The writing and provision of a wide range of reading materials would seem to be a priority but the challenge of this is daunting, given that they would have to be produced in the fifteen different main languages of Ghana. This very important issue is central to the commitment on the part of the "Education for All" movement in Ghana, to ensure that every person in the country is literate by the year 2000.

The discussion of the 'Let's Speak English' radio course project for Namibian primary school teachers dealt with two main aspects, the production process and the evaluation of the project as a whole. The project resulted in a radio series (now, in 1993, being broadcast for a second time), with accompanying self-study materials. Project activity entailed workshops and training, the design of the course and the production of radio and self-study materials. A team/group writing and production process was adopted, and while this lengthened and made more stressful the whole production process, it was appropriate in that it resulted in more effective radio-based education materials. The team approach brought together the expertise underlying good broadcasting practice on the one hand and good education and ELT practice on the other.

The informal evaluation of the results of the Namibian project reported in the paper (above, Section 4), were supplemented and developed in discussion. The additional observations included the following:

- the variation in the standard of English of the teachers proved to be a key issue. In some parts of Namibia, the English of teachers is good and so some of them found the programme too simple. (In other parts, this was not the case.) It was suggested that some kind of pre-test should be developed to exclude those who need not take the course;

- there was a perceived need for an 'end-product' in the form of an examination and a certificate of attainment, (and not merely an attendance certificate);

- in parts of the course, there was a mismatch between the pedagogical/ interactive requirements of the course material and the continuous nature of the radio broadcasts; a cassette - if it were available - could be stopped temporarily while required activities were carried out, a radio programme could not;

- teacher study groups - an intended integral part of the project methodology - generally only worked where principals of schools took a direct interest and formally set them up;

- there were too few trained Adult and Continuing Education staff available to run the various aspects of the project;

- the radio transmission did not adequately reach all parts of the country; (and the use of cassettes was not seen as a suitable alternative as few teachers had direct access to cassette players).

Against these difficulties, however, has to be set the clear evidence that the programme has had a distinct impact. Amongst other things, it has raised awareness of the importance of English and has helped to promote a more interactive teaching style in primary classrooms.

The discussion concluded with general agreement that a detailed evaluation of all aspects of the Namibian radio based project would be a valuable and worthwhile undertaking.

**2. Key issues**

Subsequent to consideration of the case studies, there was broad discussion of a number of general, overarching issues relating to the nature, role and practices of distance education. Various questions were considered. These included the following:

- where should the decision making process start in considering how to proceed with a distance education project? The argument put forward was that the process should begin with consideration of the objective. Thereafter, the processes, methods and media needed to attain the objectives could be considered. These might - or might not - include distance education methods. Subsequently, the point was made that invoking the notion of 'distance' in any circumstances might well be a total distraction. The key question is appropriateness and effectiveness of methods and approaches. If using radio or television or local newspapers, and so on, was appropriate (with or without a teacher), then that approach should be adopted;

- what should the nature of the end-product of a distance learning programme be? Does there need to be an examination and a certificate of attainment or is the actual achievement itself (for example, of becoming literate, or being successful in farming), sufficient 'end-product' motivation? (It was noted that the question of certification or success, as desired end products to participation in a programme, was a matter of considerable debate in South Africa);
- when should evaluation of a distance learning project take place? There was evidence that some evaluations were undertaken too soon after the completion of a project. A longer-term view was often necessary, though it was important to recognise that the longer one is away from the actual implementation, the more difficult it is to measure the results of a programme or, indeed, to isolate the results from other possible contributory factors. This applied particularly to socio-economic and environmental charges:

- what sorts of external constraints directly affect the implementation and quality of distance education provision? A number of factors were mentioned in this respect, with one being

developed in some detail relating to the uncertainty, and even suspicion, with which some authorities, including politicians and governments, viewed distance education. It was also suggested that in some cases distance education, on the contrary, might be used by some authorities as a safety valve and as a way of diverting difficult educational pressures.

An interesting concluding observation was made concerning the funding of distance education. It was suggested that the potential demonstrated by distance education (as evidenced by the projects under consideration here), justified a reconsideration of how resources allocated to education generally might be redistributed to provide distance education with greater support than hitherto and thus enable it to convert its potential into a major and real force for change and development.

John Burke

# THE POTENTIAL FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION: THE LINGUISTIC CHALLENGE, AND MEETING THAT CHALLENGE

## 1. Introduction

This session aimed to provide an opportunity for participants to reflect on the input over the first two and a half days of the seminar, and to develop conceptual structures which would enlighten the input of the rest of the seminar. The summary of the input from the plenary speakers and the case studies presented focused on three major areas: materials, learners and administration.

In the area of materials, the issues that had been raised included:

- **flexibility** of learning provided for in distance education
- **modularisation** of learning necessitated by distance education
- **level of technology/availability of resources** and the implications for an approach to distance education materials
- **language/type of discourse** of the materials and the relationship with the intended learner.

In the area of learners, the issues included:

- questions of **access**, in terms of linguistic competence of learners, cultural and ideological issues, and the academic discourse of distance materials
- **learner training and learning styles**
- the importance of **contact** with tutors and with other learners
- questions of **appropriate assessment** and methodologies for assessment, both formative, related to input, and summative.

In the area of administration, the issues included:

- **infrastructure issues**, and the need for robust systems
- **materials preparation issues**, and the language issues related to them
- **tutor/trainer training issues**
- **delivery modes/assessment modes**

The seven case studies discussed so far were briefly reviewed in the light of the issues above, and characterised as follows:

- video-led teacher development focusing on attitude change and new teaching methods (Zimbabwe)
- situation-led teacher development of deeper understanding of context and role, mediated by a sympathetic/disinterested outsider (Aston)
- materials-led learning, where objectives/needs may be lost in the joy of technology (Mauritius)
- radio support to a generally face-to-face teaching of literacy (Ghana)
- field research which established workable distance education methodologies, but which did not seem to transfer to larger scale activity (Pakistan)
- radio-led language improvement courses for teachers, limited by technical and other problems (Namibia).

There was some discussion of this before the participants broke into three groups, each group considering one of the three areas, materials, learners and administration. The task for each group was to list the major language issues for consideration in their area before preparing to initiate a distance education programme. While the purpose of the session was more process than product

oriented, each group came up with a list of issues, and these were presented and discussed briefly in the follow-up plenary session. As might be expected, many of the issues appeared in more than one area.

**Materials**

- Need for knowledge of the target learners, of objectives for the materials and assessment criteria before materials are prepared. Matching the medium to the learners and their purposes.
- Tone/attitude of the materials towards the reader/listener/viewer. Appropriate register for the successful expression of content.
- Discourse genres: appropriacy for the learner, including cultural appropriacy.
- Relationship between the language of the materials and the language required to be produced by the learners. Possibility of using other languages in the materials: for instructions or a summary of the content.
- Language of instructions: difficulty level vis-à-vis tasks or content.
- Design/layout of materials to enhance ease of access for the learner, use of repetition in ephemeral media (radio/video).
- Possibility of core material plus supplements: learner training activities, glosses, self-tests, etc.

**Learners**

- Need for market research into the language levels of the learners. Does disparity in levels matter?
- To what extent can materials be learner driven, or do they have to be content driven?
- Possibility of self-testing, accompanied by 'taster packs' of materials. Possibility of multi-level materials including glossaries and summaries.
- Consideration of need for, and opportunities for, learner/tutor contact, and learner/learner direct contact.
- Range of registers to be used in the materials, and a clear policy in tutorial input.
- Consideration of cultural mores: the role of rote learning and its implications in distance learning.
- How can conflicting views be presented to learners without the desired objective being obscured? To what extent can distant learners be encouraged to assimilate/evaluate/validate the input?

**Administration**

- Identify the target audience and collect evidence of their linguistic ability and previous experience in learning.
- Refine the course objectives in the light of this information.
- Provide guidelines to materials writers on tone/discourse genres to be used.
- Design tutor support mechanisms.
- Provide detailed student handbooks to cover all administrative aspects of the course: exam schedules, assignment deadlines.
- Sensitise administrators to linguistic issues: provide training to ensure the procedures and language used is in harmony with objectives and good practice.
- Devise a monitoring mechanism for tutors which ensures that the information required is elicited.

Gordon Slaven

# LANGUAGE ISSUES IN ENGLISH MEDIUM, TERTIARY LEVEL, DE COURSES FOR ESL LEARNERS

## FORMAT

This workshop session comprised a brief presentation, two discussion tasks, feedback on these, and handouts.

## OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

The presenters provided a broad overview of issues pertaining to a research project on which they collaborated: *Study of the language needs of Commonwealth students studying at a distance through the medium of English*. This project was commissioned by the Commonwealth of Learning in collaboration with the ODA and the British Council, and involved case studies of different distance education institutions within twelve Commonwealth countries.

The primary focus of the session was on one of the areas looked at in the study (*Materials Development*), and typical features of this in the project as a whole were considered from three perspectives: (1) Materials; (2) Learners; (3) Instructional Paths.

## TYPICAL FEATURES

### 1) Materials

The following heads were identified to characterise key features:

- **Print-based**
  (although audio input is used to a very small extent, financial considerations , low levels of available technology, and the fact that DL materials are frequently produced under 'emergency' conditions dictate that these materials are usually in print form.)

- **Higher Education**

- **Award-bearing**
  (learners are frequently studying to obtain external degrees, or in-service (eg teaching qualifications).)

- **English medium**

- **L2 learners**
  (learners are normally studying in a second language, which is English in most cases.)

- **In-country production**
  - in some countries there is a very long tradition of distance learning (eg Nigeria);
  - there is often a massive demand for distance learning;
  - there is often open access to participants;
  - in setting up distance education programmes, there is frequently a short, intensive 3-4 week course for the materials developers in basic distance materials-writing skills. This course is often very prescriptive and provides a basic template to the materials writers.

**2) Learners**

The following ways of thinking about distance learners and their needs were identified:

- **Content learner**
  (learners are often perceived as being no more than CONTENT LEARNERS - attention is often not paid to the following capacities in which they can also be considered as learners.)

- **Language learner**
  (learners often have experience only of studying formal features of the second language and may lack communicative competence and creative capacity in the language.)

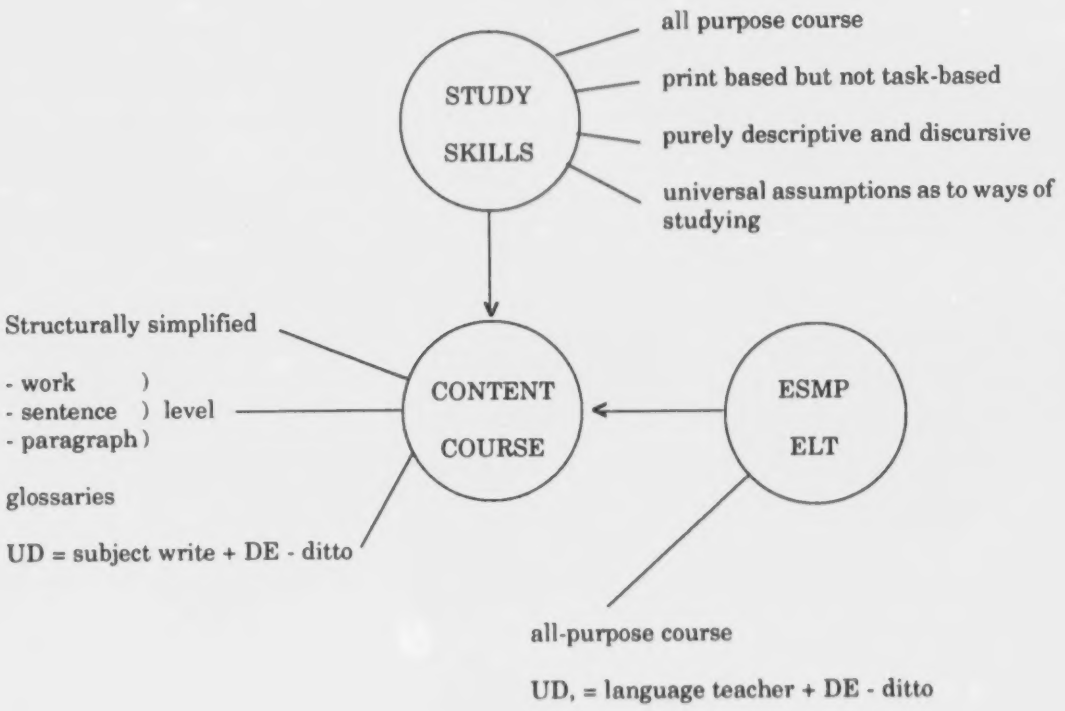
- **Reader learner**
  (learners may be unpractised readers in L1 as well as in L2.)

- **Writer learner**
  (learners may have little or no prior experience of extended writing although this may be the major means of assessment.)

- **Self-study learner**
  (in distance learning, skills may be required which are contrary to the traditions of very directed, lockstep learning.)

**3) Instructional paths**

Striking similarities were found between the materials and the organisation of courses across all the twelve countries. In most cases, the following instructional path was followed:



**TASK 1**

Participants were given an example unit/lesson of DE material to consider. The module was chosen because it was considered to be typical of much of the material surveyed. In groups participants were asked to answer the following questions:

1. What general assumptions about learning, language learning and the L2 learner are implicit in the model and the material?

2. To what extent do the model and the materials address the needs of the:

   content learner
   language learner
   reader learner
   writer learner
   self-study learner?

In response to this task, the following specific points were raised:

**CONTENT**
- prescriptive
- propaganda - aim to inculcate moral values
- no discussion or encouragement of critical thinking

**LANGUAGE**
- difficult even for an educated native speaker (no concessions made to the L2 user)
- two words glossed but inappropriate choices. No glossing of other words
- no recycling of vocabulary

**READER**
- lack of use of devices such as listing, boxing, dividing text up into manageable sections
- no inferential skills required
- no interaction with the text
- a very strong authorial 'voice'
- no humour/entertainment

**WRITER**
- simple question/answer activities
- no scope for creativity or personal investment

**SELF-STUDY**
- unclear whether 'activities' require written response, thinking or discussing
- material is self-contained - does not assume any outside reference or use of other texts/resources
- very mechanical mode of self study
- since answers to the questions are in the back of the pack, there may be no incentive to do the exercises

**ADDITIONAL POINTS RAISED BY SPEAKERS**
- the material takes no account of what we know about how people learn and what facilitates learning
- it underestimates the needs of L2 learners or, where these needs are acknowledged, they are dealt with in an inappropriate way
- a high percentage of DL course participants drop out because of the difficulty of the language used in the materials.

**TASK 2**

Participants were asked what changes/improvements they could make to the material they had been asked to look at and, in the feedback, two particular models for making the meanings of the text more accessible to the users emerged: (1) concurrent (specific) and (2) integrated.

**(1) Concurrent (specific)**
This would involve paying attention to the vocabulary, form and rhetorical structure of the text, and providing help with these features for those who need it.

**(2) Integrated**
In this case, use would be made of:

- illustrations and explication to 'demystify' the text
- use of a variety of genres (eg letters, stories, anecdotes, dialogue, etc) to involve the imagination and to make the material more accessible.

**The speakers raised the following additional key points:**

**(3) Support v development**
Should the aims of these changes/modifications be to support the users to understand the text or to develop skills which would help them to understand subsequent texts more easily?

**(4) Explicit v implicit**
Should the additions constitute an explicit language teaching component or be implicit in the methodology (eg through the grading of tasks)?

**(5) Nature of the support or development**
This might relate to any of the following agendas:

- language
- reading
- writing
- learner training

These agendas might be addressed separately or in an integrated format.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The speakers raised (and answered) two fundamental questions and issued a warning:

1. Can materials produced in one context be used elsewhere?

**NO**

2. In a minimal team to produce materials for distance education, is there a need for an English language teaching expert, in addition to a subject specialist and editor/instructional designer, if English is to be used as the medium of instruction in an L2 situation?

**YES**

3. In the design of distance learning materials, it is important to be alert to the danger of losing sight of the primacy of EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS. This oversight can sometimes occur as a result of the materials producers being distracted by production and marketing values (much of the jargon associated with distance education focuses only on these values).

The following handouts were distributed to participants in the seminar:

1. *Language practitioner as a cross-curriculum editor / materials developer.*
2. Example unit/lesson from a distance education programme.
3. Bibliography.

Charlotte Creed (Presenter)
Badri Koul (Presenter)
Martin Parrott (Rapporteur)

# THE OPPORTUNITY COST OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

## Introduction

The presentations during the course of the week provided examples of projects which were well resourced and which relied on a considerable level of professional expertise. This paper will describe a small scale, small budget project which had to be set up with minimal preparation time, using only one or two staff. It is concerned with the opportunity cost of distance education to the learner. The recipients are teachers in Hanoi, teaching English to a group of economists, who were preparing to do a distance learning Master's degree in economics through the medium of English.

I was influenced by the following four factors:

1. The literature suggests that distance education enables women to gain access to higher education. However, in view of the extremely long working hours for teachers in Hanoi, distance education would lengthen the day unacceptably.

2. Experience from Papua New Guinea suggested that opportunity cost was a significant obstacle to increasing the numbers of women in distance education.

3. Between 1976 and 1983, I worked in the Faculty of Economics at the University of Maribor in Slovenia. The University had about three to four thousand full-time, and about six thousand part-time students. As the economic situation deteriorated during the 1980s, there was a steady decline in the number of part-time and distance learning students, because the opportunity cost of part-time study became too great.

4. In addition, I had had a very positive experience of distance learning while doing an MSc at Aston University.

## The Vietnam Environment

In Vietnam, the new market economy is creating enormous economic pressure. A very senior cadre earns $20 per month. Statistics indicate that an urban family of four need $120 for basic needs. Medicine and schooling have to be paid for and school places are becoming more competitive as parents seek entry to the better schools. ELT teachers are at a premium, and well paid jobs with joint-venture companies and NGOs are in high demand, making possible salaries of $200 per month. Men share household and child rearing responsibilities with women. However, there is strong family pressure placed on ELT teachers to earn as much as possible. This results in teachers doing two or three jobs, although they also maintain their teaching post in the public sector, since this may provide a route to overseas study.

## The preparatory course for the Master's degree in Economics

A group of Vietnamese students was selected to do a Master's degree in Economics by distance learning and the language of instruction was English. As they were unfamiliar with a market system of economics and as their knowledge of English was insufficient, a preparatory course was arranged. The course was set up with provision for language training included in the budget. It was intended to be a five-month day release course, but students were not identified until a late date, and scheduling had not taken account of holidays. Accordingly, the programme could only run for eleven weeks. At present, Vietnamese students are highly motivated to apply for scholarships, but well qualified students are declining in number since there are many projects running. There is a strong element of competition, with students disappearing after interview to join other courses which offer a higher per diem.

The ELT component on the preparatory course was run by one expatriate and three Vietnamese teachers. It was felt that Distance Education would work well in Vietnam with its highly motivated students and 1,000 year old Chinese-influenced education system which venerates the knowledge of the book. I had prepared pre-sessional listening materials at the Asian Institute of Technology and aimed to develop a bank of materials to use on this and subsequent preparatory courses.

The distance learning Master's degree in Economics is now running. Many students have negotiated full time release and on one afternoon a week they work on materials with a British economist and a language teacher.

**The Vietnamese teachers of English**

On entry to the preparatory course, students were at IELTS band 3/4 with a requirement to reach band 6 in 90 hours of course time. Needs are primarily for reading (a minimum of 200 pages each week from books and journal articles), with little need for speaking or listening. The Vietnamese teachers worked with commercially available English for economics texts to teach the required skills. Accordingly, they were mirroring the work of the economics teacher, insofar as they were reading and discussing economics texts with the students. However, it emerged that the teachers were disadvantaged if the students' answers differed from those in the teacher's guide, since they were unfamiliar with the content of the economics course and with terminology used in that field. As a result, students began to lose confidence in the teachers when they could not explain text content (when compared to the economics teacher). Similarly, they frequently could not explain the metaphors so commonly used in economics, eg 'the bandwagon effect' or the 'liquidity trap'. This was also a cultural problem because they are unfamiliar with the market system. This failure to deal with students' questions had a demoralising effect on teachers and resulted in reduced attendance at language classes.

**The proposed solution**

It was suggested that the teachers try to complement the work of the economist rather than duplicate it, and that they do so by focusing on formal schemata rather than content schemata. In this work, they could draw on the substantial volume of research done at Birmingham University by Dudley-Evans and Henderson (1990); Henderson, Dudley-Evan and Backhouse (1993); Henderson and Hewings (1987); Hoey (1983; 1991); Tadros (1985); and others . Work could also be done on the use of metaphor (Henderson 1982); on vocabulary; on lexical familiarisation (Bramki and Williams 1984); on the use of conditional forms in economics text (Mead and Henderson 1983), and on the relation between text and graphs, tables, etc (Henderson and Hewings 1987).

**The further problem**

The application in the classroom of this approach to improving the students' understanding of discourse in economics elicited an interested response from the students and from the Vietnamese teachers of English. However, the teachers were unable to undertake the study required to enable them to teach in this manner or even to meet to discuss the approach, because they were so overburdened. They were teaching in excess of forty hours a week and working in very difficult circumstances. Their families depended on the income they could earn and they were, therefore, unable to teach fewer hours. Hence, for these teachers, the opportunity cost of further study was too great. The problem, though, was that if these teachers did not learn what was required of them, then the English classes for the next preparatory course for postgraduate economists would again prove unsatisfactory. Other Vietnamese teachers of English could be recruited, but as they too would know little or nothing about the language of economics, the problem of introducing the students to the formal schemata of economics, and thereby improving their reading, would remain. It was necessary, therefore, to find a way of helping the existing Vietnamese teachers of English to acquire the necessary knowledge.

**The further solution**

The solution arrived at was to provide the teachers with off-air video-cassette recordings of news broadcasts, short documentaries, and other programmes. They were also given tapescripts of these programmes and a selection of comprehension and vocabulary exercises, plus suggestions as to how the recordings could be exploited in the classroom. The objective in supplying such recordings and exercises was, firstly, simply to reduce the teachers' workload by providing them with a package of interesting, enjoyable, and varied materials which, with relatively little preparation, they could use in some of their many (other) classes.

The second objective was to gradually and covertly introduce those language issues which the teachers would later have to consider in their English for economics classes. For example, the BBC World Service television programme, 'Earthfile', generally has a Situation-Problem-Solution-Evaluation structure, and the gradual recognition by the teachers of the existence of this structure and the assistance that this recognition gives to comprehension is of value to them and to their many students. Furthermore, the role of clause relations in helping listeners to understand the text and predict its development also becomes apparent. Similarly, such short documentaries contain many examples of the predictive categories identified by Tadros, eg "Enumeration", "Advance Labelling", and "Question". Hence, the teachers gradually become familiar with the generic structure of documentaries, news broadcasts, interviews and so forth. The accumulation of this knowledge and understanding will therefore be of value when the time comes once again to consider the rhetorical structure of economics text. Vocabulary development and a discussion of metaphors is also an important part of this work.

As written evaluation of the video-recorded material, exercises, and suggestions for exploitation can be difficult and time-consuming, teachers can use audio-cassettes to record their comments, criticism, suggestions, or questions (Kaikumba and Cryer 1988). This is a convenient method of evaluation, because it means that teachers can use any spare moments they have to record whatever occurs to them and they do not have to worry about the overall shape of the report. The use of audio-cassettes encourages the recording of not only a wide range of comments, but also of comments which teachers might hesitate to put in writing. Phonological features also convey a great deal of information.

**Conclusion**

While it is too early to say what effect this project will have on the teachers' work in the long term, there is no doubt that the immediate effect is indeed to ease the teachers' workload, to raise their morale, to allow them time to reflect on their work, to give them an opportunity to evaluate materials and methods with which they are unfamiliar, and to encourage them to make an increasing contribution to the development of the work. The project suggests that distance learning can be a valuable extension of the language teacher's work and that such an extension does not require substantial financial resources, material resources, or expertise.

Ron Boyle

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# PRACTICALITIES OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

**Context**

The CELSE distance TESOL programme which is described here is on the post graduate courses offered by the University of Manchester's School of Education. The programme is modular, with 10 units per module. Modules are mainly print-based, and materials are posted monthly to students worldwide. Modules are offered:

- as part of a Masters level course
- as part of a Diploma level course
- as free-standing modules with APL potential
- as in-country courses, partially tutor-led, for groups of overseas students

The distance programme is currently being followed by over 100 students, approximately three-quarters of whom are based overseas. In addition, single modules are being taken by several groups in Eastern Europe and a group in Sri Lanka.

The programme aims to maximise the choices available to individual students in terms of: modules, start dates and the sandwiching of distance and contact modules.

This description of the practicalities will focus on four points:

- distance education is not the norm
- distance students are distant
- distance students are not students
- distance materials are special

**Distance Education is not the norm**

a) For the University

Various faculties within the University have distance learning programmes, but these are all working separately. The University administration is not set up to deal with distance learners, so each programme has separate administration. This administration is not funded by the University's central finance; the funding has to be a bolt-on cost element to distance modules.

Although the administration is separate, a distance module is recognised as equal to a contact module of the University's Masters or Diploma courses; the University requires distance programmes to comply with rigorous academic and administrative procedures.

b) For the student

Most of CELSE's distance learners have no previous experience of distance learning. Many begin their Master's course by distance, having applied by post, and so have no knowledge of Manchester, the University, CELSE or its tutors. The students can be seen as having two central requirements - information and support. These requirements and ways of meeting them are the focus of this paper.

**Distance students are *distant***

This may seem to be stating the obvious - of course they are distant. But they are distant in different ways. CELSE has very few students who are UK-based; there are single students in Lao,

in Brazil, in the Gulf States, in Japan. All have their own particular problems with distance. Some have no ready access to phone or Fax facilities, others find their materials detained in customs. Some have restricted access to libraries, some are fortunate enough to have fellow teachers who are interested in discussing points from the distance materials with them.

For many distance learners, isolation is a key problem. To support the distance learners, two requirements need to be met. The first of these is the need for information. A general information pack was developed to provide answers to the four questions most commonly asked (or rather, written) by CELSE's applicants:

How much does it cost?

When can I start? When will I get the materials?

How does the programme work?

Where can I stay during the contact block?

Of course, not all applicants ask these and only these questions; to respond to other queries, a database of questions and answers has been built up.

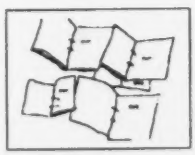
For advice on module choice and scheduling, the distance learners' point of contact is the distance learning administrator. In order to be able to deal with all the queries, it was decided that the administrator would need to have:

- experience of learning at a distance
- work experience of TESOL
- knowledge of the contents of TESOL MEd modules

Once they have the basic information about cost, when they can start and how, distance learners need further information - about which modules they can choose, when to pay and how to pay.

The administration also needs information about modules to be taken in order to:

- notify the module tutors
- inform the University's central administration
- print materials



The distance materials themselves are printed on a 'just-in-time' basis to avoid:

having a backlog of outdated stock

storage problems

Costs of printing large stocks before they are required

Having decided which module(s) to follow and when to start, the distance learner is likely to have further information requirements, but more pressing are likely to be the learner's needs for support as they encounter the advantages and disadvantages of studying at a distance.

**Distance students are not students**

That is to say, they are not only students - they have, in all probability, chosen to study by distance because they have job and/or family commitments which prevent them from following a full-time face-to-face course of study.

In the case of TESOL distance learners, working while studying may be as much an advantage as a disadvantage. Students following the programme by post often have the advantage of being able to experiment with new approaches and techniques, to apply their new knowledge and gauge its effectiveness with their own classes. However, as illustrated, there can be some disadvantages to distance study:

Distance learners beginning the programme frequently express anxiety about assessment. The materials contain self assessment questions (SAQs) with answer keys, and the SAQs are objective or semi-objective in form, so that the students can perceive their progress. However, each module requires that they complete an assignment - often to produce, analyze and evaluate materials - and it is this assignment that causes anxiety. There are many possible reasons for this anxiety - the students have, after all, no classmates against whom they can measure their progress, many will not have undertaken any form of academic writing for several years. To meet students' requirements for support in this area, the distance learning 'Welcome Pack' includes guidelines for assignment writing and a set of criteria, with descriptors, for assignment grading. The criteria and descriptors are illustrated in the following table:

**Criteria for essay-type assignments and dissertations**

| Content | Structure | Grade |
|---|---|---|
| is sufficient, and relevant to issue being discussed<br><br>shows critical understanding of relevant facts and issues<br><br>shows orginality in thinking and breadth in reading | integrates detail into a coherent whole<br><br>guides reader through to a reasoned conclusion<br><br>is supported throughout by appropriate and accurate language | A<br><br>(70% or more) |
| is sufficient, and relevant to issue being discussed<br><br>shows good grasp of relevant facts and issues<br><br>shows breadth of study and some originality | reveals an attempt to create a coherent whole<br><br>attempts to guide reader through to a reasoned conclusion<br><br>is rarely affected by inappropriate or inaccurate language | B<br><br>(60% to 69%) |
| is just sufficient to cover the subject but has a few irrelevancies<br><br>shows satisfactory grasp of relevant facts and issues<br><br>shows adequate reading but little originality | links parts together but falls short of creating a coherent whole<br><br>does not always guide reader and does not always have a conclusion<br><br>is weakened in places by inappropriate or inaccurate language | C<br><br>(50% to 59%) |
| does not fully cover subject specified and/or is sometimes irrelevant<br><br>shows a weak grasp of relevant facts and issues<br><br>suffers from inadequate reading and thinking | somtimes fails to link parts to each other<br><br>shows little regard for reader and does not come to a justifiable conclusion<br><br>is weakened by inappropriate or inaccurate language | D<br><br>(40% to 49%) |

Distance students, with no seminars or tutorials, and no peers to engage in fruitful discussion are, essentially, learning from reading. There are exceptions to this - CELSE's Educational Technology modules have computer and/or video based delivery systems - but
the majority of distance students will be learning from print-based materials, and this implies a heavy reading input load. This is a further area where distance students require support.

**Distance materials are special**

Just as two types of student requirement have been identified, so distance learning materials may be seen to be special in two ways:

they need to provide information (about programme structure as well as academic content);

they need to provide support for students (facing isolation and a heavy reading input load).

Many distance programmes keep the two information requirements separate. Many offer study skills (academic reading and writing) support modules separately. In CELSE's case the information and support are all built into the modules; this requires the administrator to work as a member of the design team.

It was said that CELSE modules consist of 10 units - actually they consist of 10 units plus a unit 0. The unit 0 is an introductory unit which contains information about:

- the programme
- the structure and organisation of the module
- reading requirements for the module (including an annotated bibliography)
- the assignment

In addition the unit provides support for students in the form of:

- a glossary of key terms used in the module
- explanations of icons used as signposts throughout the modules
- introductory SAQ tasks to provide a 'taster' for the module proper
- combination of input reading and SAQs to provide study skills support

The following icons are examples of signposting used for student support:

Objectives

Pre-reading

Input Reading

SAQ

Answer Key

Assignment

Once students have started a module, record keeping becomes important. The administration and the tutors need to know what has been sent, where, and when. Clearly a computer database with student addresses and other details can be of use here. However, the tutors are not, necessarily, going to be able to access computerised data, so print records may also be of use.

During the module, students may be confronted by some of the disadvantages of studying at a distance. Examples of these have been given earlier, but I should like to return to the point that was made at the beginning: **Distance students are *distant***. They may be distant from academic facilities, so that a postal library and photocopy service may be required. They are also distant from their tutors, and may only be able to communicate through the post. 'Less' distant students may have access to phone, Fax, or even E-mail facilities, but in the case of CELSE students, these last three are uncommon. Post, then, is the means by which feedback on the module is communicated from students to tutors and feedback on their work is passed from tutors to students.

In the following illustration the distance student can be seen in isolation, with no facilities, awaiting the arrival of a distance module. The central point of this illustration is that the *materials* in distance education must encompass the support that the isolated distance student requires. CELSE is currently researching means of including the required support in the input reading materials.

Gillian Walsh
CELSE, University of Manchester

## RAPPORTEUR'S SUMMARY

In the discussion that followed the presentation, other points emerged. Materials are updated every two to three years. Each module is bought separately. A maximum of two modules can be taken at a time. The whole course consists of eight taught modules and a dissertation which is equivalent to four modules. Each module is supposed to represent 80 hours of work. All distance modules are based on residential modules. New modules are tried out in a 'pilot year', and revised in the light of feedback from tutors and students.

The residential requirement is equivalent to a ten-week term, but this could also consist of the six-week 'summer block', in which teaching is concentrated so that modules may be completed in this time.

David Taylor

# THE COSTS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Costs were discussed under the three headings of **cash, control, contact**.

**CASH**
(things you actually have to disburse money for)

**CONTROL**
(things that cause new problems, that require staff to change their behaviour, that require the creation of new systems)

**CONTACT**
(things relating to the changed nature of contact between tutors and students and between students)

**CASH**

Cash covered the setting up costs of developing a distance master's programme. These were estimated as on the accompanying document. Allowing for opportunity costs, the total cost is £141, 587 for five core modules. This works out at £28,317 per module. This means that, to break even, 81 modules must be sold. However, if delivery costs are also taken into account, we have to add another £310 per module. The break-even point is then 708 modules sold.

Set up costs include research into the nature of distance education (see David Carver's paper *Concepts of quality in distance education*) and also into what is offered by other UK institutions.

Participants were asked to do a task, concerned with finding cheap ways of producing four further options in year two after launching the four core modules in year one.

**Task: Cash costs**

You have launched your distance programme with five core modules ' in the bank'. Once students have completed these, they have to select option modules (five out of a menu of ten). Your Year 2 target is to produce four of the option modules.

The Finance Committee of your institution is having kittens at the costs incurred to date without any covering revenue. (You have told them that future modules - after your apprenticeship year - won't cost so much!)

Present three alternative ways of generating modules, with indicative costings.

Suggestions included franchising, commissioning one's own staff to write modules in their own time, relying on published material (and simply providing assignments), and collaborating with another institution, perhaps overseas.

**CONTROL**

The 'control' costs of designing and delivering a distance education programme include such things as the increased complexity of academic staff management, the increased demand on secretarial support, and new demands on the central administration. An important element is the lack of control over the student's learning environment in terms of learning resources and support systems. Experience shows that it is essential to block staff writing time to ensure reasonably rapid production of materials.

**'Control' costs of designing and delivering a distance education programme**

1. Increase in complexity of academic staff management eg module-writing time needs to be 'blocked'; this has implications for:
   - taught-course timetabling of staff;
   - release of staff (for consultancy, conferences, staff development)

2. Increase in demands on secretarial support: eg heavy additional requirement for wordprocessing of scripts

3. New demands on Registry, to design system for distance education students:
   eg - to process applications, including provision for assessment of APL;
   - to monitor receipt, internal teaching and return of materials;
   - to organise overseas examination centres
4. Lack of control over the student's learning environment, in terms of:
   eg - learning resources
   - support systems

The task under this heading was to specify the kind of information to be obtained by applicants which would enable the receiving institution to decide whether an applicant should be accepted or not (assuming he or she met the entry qualifications). Suggestions from groups were mainly concerned with finding out about the applicant's learning environment and access to resources such as libraries, in a way that enabled the institution to make a judgement in a factual and quantifiable basis as far as possible.

**CONTACT**

Costs under this heading mainly relate to the quality of the experience, for both academic staff and students, arising from the changed nature of the contact between tutors and students and among students. (See extract from David Carver's paper *Concepts of quality in distance education.*)

**Contact 'costs' in distance education**
These relate essentially to the quality of the experience, for both academic staff and students. (There is no necessary implication that the contact 'costs' of distance-learning outweigh the benefits.) The contrastive features listed below indicate where such 'costs' may arise.

| **Distance learning mode**<br>***Probable Features*** | **Contact-mode**<br>***Possible Features*** |
|---|---|
| packages | libraries/bookshops/reading lists/ bibliographies |
| purpose-made materials | authentic texts |
| individual study | group activities |
| predetermined content and outcomes;and attempt to control process through design of activities | negotiated content, process and outcomes |
| an institutional base | personal relationships among students and between teachers and learners |
| summative assessment | formative assessment |

| | |
|---|---|
| judgmental role of institution | collaborative roles of learners and teachers |
| directed programme | exploratory study |
| assignment oriented | process oriented |
| focus on skills and knowledge | focus on skills, knowledge and attitudes |
| driven by administration and design of the programme | driven by teaching and learning |
| periodic review of design | on-going revision of content and process |
| quality assurance and accountability | learner autonomy |
| 'in work-place' context | 'out of work-place' context |

(With acknowledgements to David Carver, Moray House)

The task here was to do a SWOT analysis from the institution's perspective and from the student's perspective.

**Student's Perspective**

**Strengths** include no loss of income, no loss of job, no need to stay at home, lower costs.
**Weaknesses** are:- isolation from tutor, delayed interaction leading to frustration , lack of resources, length of time needed, and the possibility that the study mode could be perceived negatively.
**Opportunities** include the possibility of a more 'applied' approach, support from colleagues, the development of independent study skills, the chance for women to gain an internationally recognised qualification, and the possibility that the mode of study could, in itself, have some prestige.
**Threats** arise from the possibility of stress and work overload , misinterpretation of tutor feedback, postal delay and hostility from colleagues who might feel jealous and resentful.

**Institution's Perspective**

**Strengths** are seen as arising from the increased flexibility and the extension of educational provision.
**Weaknesses** include the possibility of assignments being plagiarised and 'recycled' through successive generations of students.
**Opportunities** come from the chance of enhancing and extending the institution's reputation, the development of the experience and expertise of academic and other staff, increased income, and a chance to offer good educational practice to more people throughout the world.
**Threats** are represented by the possibility of production slippage.

**CONCLUSION**

Everyone was impressed by the thoroughness of the costing analysis and suitably terrified by the very large sums involved. All participants were grateful for having undergone what was an extremely sobering experience. Cynical thoughts that the exercise was designed to discourage possible competitors were of course immediately dismissed. All lingering ideas that distance education was a cheap option were effectively dispelled.

Jim Morrison (Presenter)
David Taylor (Rapporteur)

## UK Distance Master's Degrees in the ELT Area

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Moray House |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Award | MSc | MA | MEd | MEd | MA | Adv Cert | MA | MA |
| Specialism | Teaching English | TEFL/TESL | TESOL | ELT | Lings(TESOL) | Lang Teaching | Dist Ed | TESOL |
| Duration | 20-23 months | 15-24 months | 2-7 years | 2-6 years | 27 months | 12 months | 2-5 years | 3-6 years |
| UK Residence | 3 days | 20 weeks | 10 weeks | 8 days | None | 2 weeks | None | None |
| No of modules | 8 | 14 | 8 | 6 | 10 | 10 weeks x 15 hours | 6 | 10 |
| Distance Mode | 8 | 0 (Project only) | 4 | 6 | 10 | all | 6 | 10 |
| Core modules | 7 | 12 | 6-8 | 6 | 8 | all minus 1 | 4 | 5 |
| Option modules | 1 from 7 | 2 | 0-2 from 9 | 0 | 2 from 9 | 1 from 3? | 2 from 5 | 5 from 12+ |
| Assignments | >5000 words | ? | ? | 5000 words | 3000 words | ? | 2000 words | 1500 words |
| Exams No | 4 Lings Mods | Yes | ? | None | 2(Opt Mods) | None | 5 | 2(Core Mods) |
| Exams Place | UK | UK | UK | N/A | ? | N/A | ? | Overseas/UK |
| Dissertation | Yes | 15000 words | Yes | 20000 words | 10000 words | No | 25000 words | 15000 words |

# Cognitive Styles and the Design of Instructional Materials

## Introduction

The effectiveness of instructional methods is determined by many factors, for example:

- the characteristics of the learner (what is their habitual mode of thinking and processing information?);
- the mode of presentation of the instruction (is information presented as words or pictures or an equal balance of both?);
- the organisation of contents of instruction (is information presented repeatedly at greater and greater levels of detail? Are the links between discrete topics and the learner's existing knowledge made clear?).

## 1. The Characteristics of the Learner

Many different terms have been used to describe differences between individual learners. A simple scheme based on Roham (1986) and Curry (1983) gives a three fold classification:

- instructional preferences (what method of learning does an individual prefer, eg group based, individualised, etc?)
- learning styles (what approaches does an individual adopt in a new learning situation, eg active, reflective, etc?)
- cognitive styles (how does an individual habitually represent and process information in memory during the learning process, eg in words or pictures or both, in whole or in part?)

Riding & Cheema (1992) suggested that learners differ principally in terms of two fundamental dimensions of cognitive style: the wholist - analytical dimension and the verbaliser - imager dimension (Riding 1991). An individual's cognitive style may be assessed quickly and easily using the computer presented Cognitive Styles Analysis (Riding 1991).

### 1.1 Verbal - Imagery Dimension of Cognitive Style

The verbal - imagery dimension of style is a description of an individual's habitual mode of representation of information during thinking. Verbalisers 'represent' information in words: imagers on the other hand, when they read, listen to or consider information, experience fluent, spontaneous and frequent mental pictures (Riding 1991).

### 1.2 Wholist - Analytical Dimension of Cognitive Style

The wholist - analytical dimension of cognitive style is a description of the habitual way in which an individual processes information: some individuals will process information into its component parts (described as analytics); others will retain a global view of information (described as wholists) (see Riding 1991). For wholists, there is the danger that the distinction between the parts of a topic may become blurred. For analytics, the separation of the whole into its parts may mean that one aspect of the whole may be focused on at the expense of others and its overall importance exaggerated.

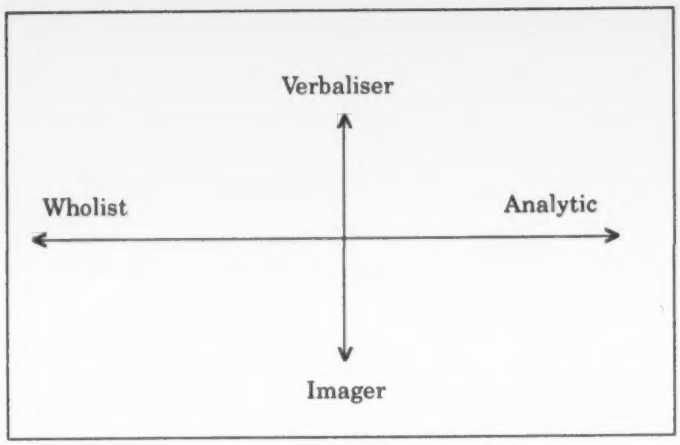



*Figure 1* The two dimensions of cognitive style

These dimensions may affect learning in two separate ways:

- the verbal - imagery dimension of cognitive style determines the most appropriate mode of presentation of information for a particular individual (eg textual, diagrammatic/ pictorial);
- the wholist - analytic dimension of cognitive style determines the most appropriate way in which the contents of instruction may be structured or organised (eg with or without a particular type of advance organiser).

## 2. Cognitive Styles and Learning Performance

Since the wholist - analytical and verbaliser - imager dimensions of cognitive style affect the processing and representation of information respectively, one may anticipate beneficial effects on learning performance if the mode and structure of that information is congruent with the learner's preferred mode of thinking.

### 2.1 Mode of Presentation

It may be possible to match the mode of presentation of information to the verbaliser - imager dimension of cognitive style. A mode for the interaction of cognitive style, learning performance and mode of presentation is suggested: imagers may be expected to benefit from the presentation of information in a diagrammatic or pictorial form; verbalisers may be expected to benefit from a textual presentation (Riding & Ashmore, 1980, Riding, Buckle et al, 1989). This model was not wholly supported by Riding & Douglas (1992) who investigated the effects of text with textual and diagrammatic supplements. Figure 2 shows the hypothetical interaction and that revealed by Riding & Douglas (op cit.).

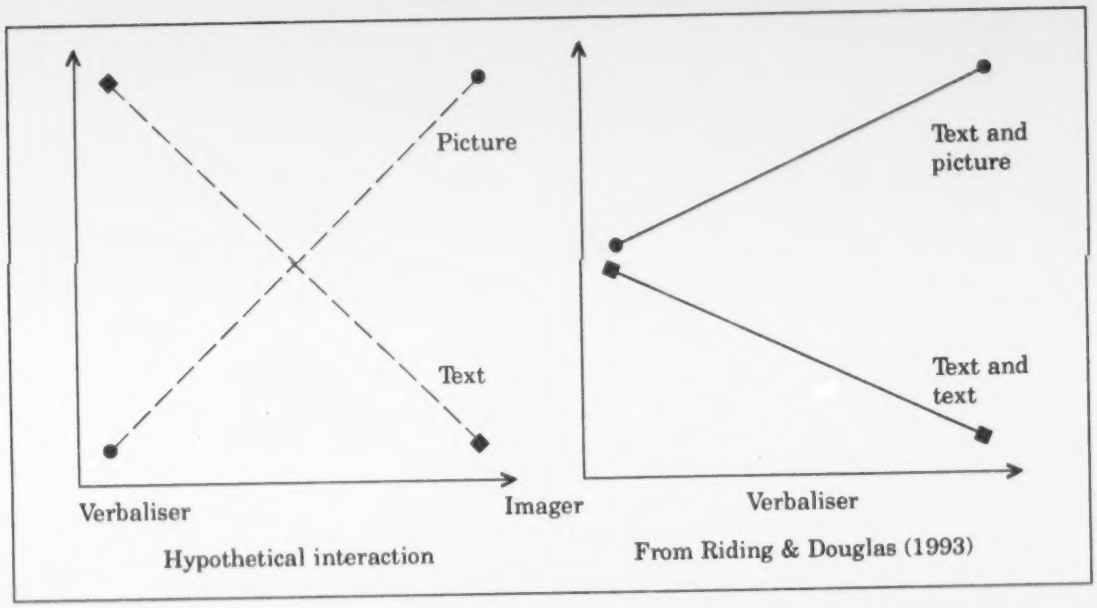



*Figure 2* Interaction of verbaliser - imager dimension, mode of presentation and learning peformance

Hence mode of presentation of information may be matched to the verbal-imagery dimension of cognitive style.

### 2.2 Structure of Presentation

In the case of the wholist - analytical dimension, the concept of matching instruction to the learner (as, for example, in the presentation of information in a visual mode for imagers as shown in Figure 2) does not apply. Both wholist and analytical styles are not ideal in the sense that neither leads necessarily to the optimum organisation of the contents of memory, ie an integrated version of the whole of a new piece of information, with links to the learner's existing knowledge. Therefore, in the case of the wholist - analytical dimension, instruction should be designed in order to compensate for the deficiencies of each style so that an optimum organisation of the contents of memory may be achieved. It is suggested that an advance organiser may facilitate this linking of new information with that already in memory (Ausubel 1976X). Furthermore, the present author would suggest that different types of advance organiser may be appropriate for the different cognitive style types. One may expect that:

- wholists may benefit from an advance organiser which shows the structure of the content in terms of its divisions into parts;
- analytics may benefit from an advance organiser which gives an overview of the whole.

Riding & Sadler-Smith (1992) investigated the effects of advance organisers by using a number of instructional treatments which had the same mode of presentation but each had a different type of organiser. Their study suggested that wholist imagers (WI) and analytic verbalisers (AV) perform better with an organiser which emphasises the links between successive topics - referred to as a linker-type organiser. Analytic imagers and wholist verbalisers on the other hand, perform better with an advance organiser which fulfils a preview function, ie gives a global and analytic overview of the content prior to the presentation of new information (Riding & Sadler-Smith, 1992).

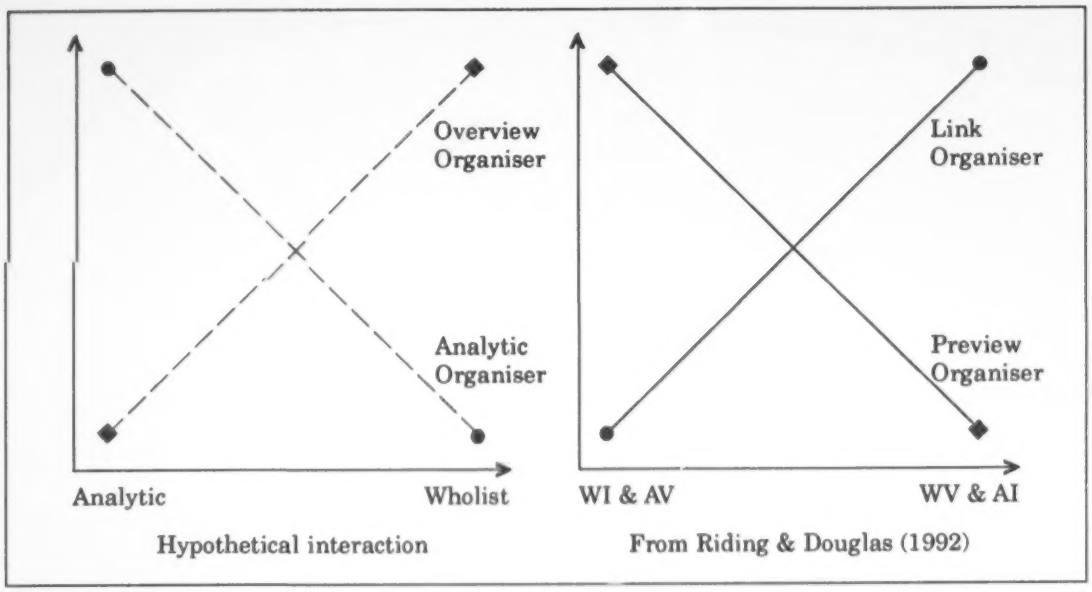



*Figure 4* Interaction of wholist - analytical dimension of cognitive style, mode of presentation and learning performance.

Hence, to accommodate individual differences in cognitive style, it may be necessary to:

- match instruction to the verbaliser - imager dimension;
- provide a compensatory strategy for the wholist - analytical dimension.

### 3. Instructional Prescriptions for the Four Cognitive Style Types

It is possible, based on the model outlined above, to suggest tentative instructional prescriptions to match the learner's cognitive style.

Table 3 below summarises the instructional prescriptions for the four cognitive style types.

| | | Cognitive Style | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Wholist verbaliser | Wholist imager | Analytic verbaliser | Analytic imager |
| Mode | Text | ■ | | ■ | |
| | Picture | | ■ | | ■ |
| Type of Organiser | Linker | ■ | | | ■ |
| | Preview | | ■ | ■ | |

*Table 3* Instructional prescriptions for the four cognitive styles

## 4. Adapting Instruction to the Learner's Cognitive Style

The cognitive style differences outlined above may be accommodated by a variety of instructional media which may use a non-adaptive or an adaptive approach in the presentation, organisation and structure of the content of the instruction.

### 4.1 Adaptive Approaches

Adaptive approaches are designed to customise the instructional materials to particular cognitive style attributes. An adaptive approach would rely on the computer-based identification of a learner's cognitive style. The computer, acting as an 'intelligent tutoring system' could present instruction in the manner prescribed for the particular style of the individual learner.

### 4.2 Non-adaptive Approaches

Non-adaptive approaches cater for the whole range of cognitive style differences by:

- dual modes of presentation or content structures within a package;
- the development of two or more sets of instructional materials of contrasting designs (Riding, 1991).

#### 4.2.1 Contrasting Designs

Rather than try to accommodate style differences within the same package, it would be equally feasible to have two or more physically separate packages, each designed for particular cognitive styles. Four instructional treatments would be necessary to accommodate both dimensions of cognitive style.

#### 4.2.2 Balanced Designs

This is a 'cognitive belt and braces' approach; a variety of modes of presentation and structures maybe built into the design on the assumption that learners will focus on those attributes which best suit their preferred mode of thinking. However, it may be prudent for learners to be informed as to their cognitive style and advised as to which modes of aspects of the instructional materials are best suited to their style. Without proper advice, there is the potential for a balanced design to be used in a way which is inappropriate to the style of the learner. Balanced designs may be delivered via the medium of the printed page or the computer screen.

England (1987), in a discussion of Pask's learning styles, suggests designers can make their materials more versatile by 'build[ing] different levels into their materials. The overall structure should have enough cohesion and coherence to allow a linear progression through the material, which would suit serialist [analytics] learners. Both other levels ... can be infused to offer holists [wholists] and versatile students [analytic imagers and wholist verbalisers], the opportunity to explore concepts in their own ways.' (England, op cit. p.13).

The concept of the balanced design assumes that there will be no conflict or interference effects between simultaneous presentations in different modes. Further research is required to investigate the effectiveness of balanced designs.

##### 4.2.2.1 Computer Based Balanced Designs

Presentations could consist of a mixture of text or diagrams. Alternatively, two or more modes of presentation could be available to the student , who is free to 'toggle' between the text version and the picture version of the teaching material. The structure of a topic and hence wholist analytical dimension, could be addressed in a number of ways:

- the learner could 'toggle' between a number of different types of organiser, eg preview type or linker type and focus on the one which best suited his/her style;

- the learner could be given the option to view a concept map which provides both a whole view and a breakdown of the topic into its parts;

- the package could be designed with overview, outline and detail levels, each available at any one time for the learner to 'toggle' between.

#### 4.2.2.2 Print Based Balanced Designs

The development of balanced print designs may be technically more difficult and the end product less elegant (as a result of the inherent inflexibility of print) than a computer-based design. However, within a balanced text design, one could envisage:

- dual modes of presentation;

- alternative content/organisers maps.

Dual modes of presentation could be achieved by mapping text and picture/diagram on the same page or facing pages in a logical and consistent manner in order to facilitate learner access to the information. A sample page from a prototype balanced design and a template for the design of such a page is included in the appendix to this paper.

### Alternative Strategies

Whilst it is recognised that both adaptive and non-adaptive approaches offer great potential for the improvement of learning effectiveness and efficiency, it is also acknowledged that it may not, for a wide variety of reasons (both technical and commercial), be possible to adapt instruction to the learner. If it is not possible for technical, pedagogical or commercial reasons to produce instruction to cater for all cognitive styles, then cognitive styles information may help to identify those individuals who, by virtue of their style, may not be able to succeed with certain tasks or with certain instructional treatments. For such individuals, alternative or remedial instruction may be necessary. Through an awareness of how they learn, each individual can assume some responsibility for their own learning and take appropriate actions in those circumstances where learning is not taking place as effectively as it might. Learners, under the guidance of a tutor/counsellor, could employ a variety of strategies in order to intervene in the learning process and accommodate their own cognitive style.

### Conclusion

The wholist - analytical and the verbaliser - imager dimensions of cognitive style may have important implications for the ways in which instruction is designed and delivered. An inspection of representative self-instructional materials suggests little cognisance is taken of individual differences between learners. Hence it could be argued that conventional instructional design methodologies assume that individuals represent and process information in similar ways. A corollary of this is that the mode of presentation and structure of instructional materials should attempt to accommodate individual differences in cognitive style.

A number of models. of varying degrees of technical complexity, have been suggested in order that instructional materials may be adapted to individual differences in cognitive style. These differences could be accommodated by means of an instructional system capable of presenting information in a variety of ways using text, diagrams, still and moving photographic images, speech and sound, in a manner appropriate to the user's cognitive style. Such a multimedia system would be adaptive in that it could, using the Cognitive Styles Analysis, initially diagnose the student's preferred ways of

thinking and subsequently adapt the mode of presentation and the structure of the content, and provide a suitable advance organiser to accommodate each individual.

However, at the present time, the most practical approach would appear to be some form of balanced design in any medium or combination of media. The development of both non-adaptive and adaptive systems would be subject to commercial constraints. Further research and development work is required in designing and validating the hypothetical systems described here.

Eugene Smith

# APPENDIX

**Combustion**

## What is Natural Gas?

Overview
Natural gas, Hydrocarbons; The alkanes; Non-combustibles

### Natural Gas

Natural gas is a mixture of a large number of gases. Some of these are conbustible (i.e. they will burn), others are non-combustible (i.e. they will not burn).

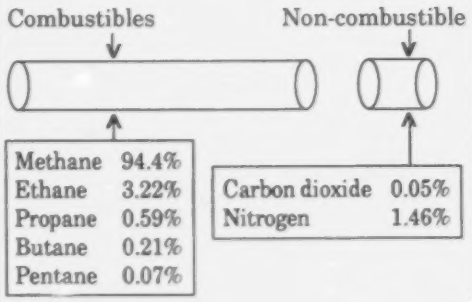
The composition of a typical North Sea gas is shown in the table below:

| Component of dry gas | | % by volume |
|---|---|---|
| Combustibles | Methane | 94.4 |
| | Ethane | 3.22 |
| | Propane | 0.59 |
| | Butane | 0.21 |
| | Pentane | 0.07 |
| Non-combustibles | Carbon dioxide | 0.05 |
| | Nitrogen | 1.46 |

Remember! These figures are for a North Sea gas, natural gas from other parts of the world may have a different composition.

Think of 100m to the power of 3 of natural gas in a pipe .....

It is made up of a number of gases. Some of these will burn (we say they are combustible), others will not (they are non-combustible) .....




Remember! These figures are for a North Sea gas; natural gas from other parts of the world may have a different composition.

**Keywords**
combustibles
non-combustibles

**Activity One**
(The answers to Activities begin on page 42)

Look at the table and/or the diagram above. Write, in the space below, three things about the composition of the North Sea gas shown:

1
2
3

<table>
<tr><td>Section</td><td colspan="2">Sub-Section</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Content header</td><td colspan="2">Section Contents</td></tr>
<tr><td>Text Window</td><td>Picture/DiagramWindow</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Activity Window</td></tr>
<tr><td>Keywords</td><td colspan="2">Location Bar</td></tr>
</table>

# RAPPORTEUR'S SUMMARY

The Distance Learning Unit of British Gas was established in 1987. Its priority concern in the development of media was the identification of particular skills needed in providing for the needs of all learners. These were text writing, trainer skills and expertise in developing audio, CD and video support. The complex materials development process involved design, implementation and evaluation.

**Presentation**
**Inquiry into materials design**

The concern for good materials initiated research on the effect of cognitive styles on learning and its practical implications for design. It was discovered that, as a system, distance learning is very flexible in time and space. However, as a mode, it is inflexible in the materials' representation of tutors and colleagues. It is very difficult to satisfy the needs of all learners because of individual differences. Different learners have different

(a) instructional preferences;
(b) learning styles (observable patterns of behaviour in learning experiences);
(c) cognitive styles (unobservable patterns of organising knowledge).

Individual differences in cognitive styles are valuable for informing materials designers about the types of learners and the best way they learn (see appendices 1 and 2). Good design aims to reach all the learners by providing for the different cognitive styles. By avoiding over-verbalised materials, for example, a good designer avoids discrimination against the imagers. Presentation of both global and analytical problems caters for both wholists and analytics.

**Implications**

Both the mode and structure of print materials should take account of different cognitive styles because learners relate easily to the type that suits them best. To compensate for the different views, the mode of presentation should be balanced between textual and pictorial/diagrammatic versions. The structure should support those that need a step-by-step link throughout the unit (analytics).

Possibilities for accommodating the implied design versions are:

(a) adaptive approaches - which should be computer assisted; or
(b) non-adaptive approaches, such as:

    (i) contrasting designs of the same material, to cater for different cognitive styles;

    (ii) balanced design within the same material.

The identification of cognitive styles is important because it can stimulate discussion of the learning process, explaining learners' reactions to distance learning materials. The theory of cognitive styles can be relied on to predict learning difficulties and adapt materials to individuals. Thus it is a resource in the improvement of the effectiveness of distance learning materials.

**Discussion**

The discussion acknowledged the usefulness of the theory. It however recognised the need for caution in adopting it. It was evident from the dimensions of cognitive style, that a learner cannot be at either end of any dimension. Thus the differences should not be taken for granted.

In accommodating different versions of mode and structure, the designer is, in fact, doing more than providing for the different learner types. The dual design is an acknowledgement that a learner may benefit from both versions. Besides, contextualisation of any mode in a learning experience takes account of the element of learning by doing, and this in itself may be compensation for the differences in cognitive styles.

It was observed that the use of audio and video can cater for the differences. Video can provide images to supplement verbal presentation for the imagers. Audio, on the other hand, can enrich diagrammatic presentation for the verbalisers.

**Conclusion**

The recognition of differences in cognitive styles can be beneficial to integrated modes of teaching. It calls for the mobilisation of teams of materials designers for the resources that each individual might bring to the different versions in the design.

Robinyah Kyeyune

# THE ROLE OF COMPUTER CONFERENCING IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

**Computer Conferencing** is a system of communication among computer users which allows any number of users to interact through a central computer. Computer conferencing differs from other apparently similar forms of communication. In a **conventional** conference the participants are in one place at one time. The participants do not have equal access if the numbers are large. In **video conferencing**, the participants are interacting at the same time but not in the same place.

**Computer conferencing** is not particularly high-tech and uses technology which is already tried and familiar. It addresses the problems of communication in distance education highlighted by other contributors. In places where the students have access to a reliable telephone system, it can provide a substitute for many of the problems faced in distance education programmes such as:

- the isolation of the learner from the centre
- feedback both administrative and academic
- the lack of contact between learners

Clearly, **distance education** can benefit from the techniques of computer conferencing.

**The system:** There is a central computer which contains files which the student can write on or read from his/her own computer. The access is by telephone line using a modem, built-in or otherwise. The nature of these central files is that they appear to be resident in the student's own computer, especially as they can be worked on directly (on-line, in real time) or be 'downloaded' to be worked on later. Since the student's contact is not continuous, the various contributions made by all the students in the system, which may come in at any time, appear to be coming in simultaneously and a 'dialogue' may develop which is recorded sequentially. This dialogue is usually academic but provision is made for social and friendly interaction as well.

The system being used by the Institute of Education for its **Certificate in On-line Education and Training** programme is the **CoSy** (Conferencing System) system which has a hierarchical structure of files. At the top of the hierarchy, there is a branching into

(1) the Conference System and

(2) an E-mail system for private communication .. as all other communication is open to all users.

Further down the hierarchy, the topics have separate files which can be accessed according to the programme the student is following. For convenience, the students are organised into tutorial groups.

**The discourse:** As with any new course, there is a discourse to be learned. At present, this is a written discourse. (A simple system of icons, based on keyboard input, is already developing.) There is an elaborate navigating system installed so that every new contribution, though numbered in chronological order, is linked to any relevant previous contribution and automatically displays any relevant comments made by other students. Although some students, as in any group, tend to dominate, it seems that those who would remain silent in face-to-face groups more often develop confidence to put forward their ideas. Far more collaboration takes place since access can be gained 24 hours a day not only in an hour of tutorial once a week.

**The cost:** Apart from the initial setting-up cost (computer, modem, access to system) to the student, the actual costs of calls can be quite low particularly if 'gateways' (which are usually on a local exchange) can be used. When these calls are offset against the reduced postal charges and travel costs, they may not be too high.

Downloading rather than working 'on-line' also reduces costs.

**Present state:** The present courses available do not have a great deal of content, concentrating as they do more on introducing the method. The new M Ed TESOL will handle much more content. They will also have the same reading list as the original course.

In order to ensure academic credibility, examinations will be given.

Compared with other forms of distance education, **Computer Conferencing** gives far more access to tutors, colleagues and to materials. Compared to conventional face-to-face teaching, **Computer Conferencing** may give also more personal access than the tutorial system. As in all forms of distance education, there is the chance of access to certain face-to-face activities, notably at the beginning of the course, for those for whom it is physically or geographically possible.

Anita Pincas

# The Multimedia Teleschool: Telematics and Language Learning

*'telematics - the integration and application of computer-based systems with telecommunication technologies.'*

## INTRODUCTION

Inexpensive and widely-available telematic group-based technologies, which can enhance distance education for language teachers, are now available.

These technologies provide learners with direct access to native-speakers across National boundaries, free of the constraints of time and distance, and can offer valuable support structures for the development of individual language skills and for the acquisition of those pedagogical techniques that are required for effective language teaching.

This paper discusses the organisational and technical requirements for the delivery of telematic-based courses in 'virtual language schools'. The implementation of group-based telematics for training language tutors, in preparation for the delivery of large-scale, pan-European language courses within the European Community's DELTA project, is described. It illustrates the application of those skills developed during the tutor-training course by the language tutors in their teaching with a group of learners located across Europe.

## INTERACTIVITY AND DISTANCE TEACHING

Traditional distance learning systems have been designed around the 'learning isolate', an individual isolated learner, who has communication links with his tutor through the postal system and voice telephone (and, more recently, facsimile), but who has few, if any, communication links to other learners. Early exponents of distance education (such as the UK's Open University) soon realised the importance of a high level of tutor-student and student-student interaction and, being aware that this element was lacking in their distance courses, instituted the now-crucial regional and local Study Centre system.

In the provision of courses for language teachers, where communication is not only the means, but the end objective as well, the level of interactivity provided within the structure of a course will be a critical factor in the acquisition of both language skills and pedagogical principals for imparting those skills.

The focus on interactivity within a distance education scenario, particularly for the delivery of courses primarily aimed at developing communication skills in order to teach communication through language, is of vital importance.

Advanced communication technologies offer the means to provide distance learners with access to human interaction, not just between the learner and the tutor, but also between the learner and his peers. These technologies offer the facility to construct group-oriented virtual learning environments and thus enable the important elements of peer-to-peer interaction and learning, within 'virtual learning groups', to take place.

## THE BERLITZ 'ENGLISH FOR BANKING' COURSE

The Berlitz 'English for Banking' course is one of the language programmes delivered as part of the Multimedia Teleschool (MTS) project which is, itself, one of the major current EC DELTA projects designed to develop technologies and pedagogies for the delivery of telematic-based education and training across Europe.

'English for Banking' is a 12 week distance education course delivered using advanced communication technologies and techniques. It has evolved from a standard language course delivery format used by the Berlitz Language School for some years, based around the provision of fortnightly "study letters".

In the standard format of course delivery, a study letter containing an assignment is sent to each distance learner by post. This study letter contains a personal letter to the student from his tutor as well as a list of assignments linked to course books and audio tapes. The student works on the assignments, listens to the audio tapes, and returns the completed assignments to the tutor through the postal system at the end of the two week period. Any interaction which occurs is through the medium of the written word or occasional telephone conversation between tutor and student. Student-to-student interaction is non-existent.

Within the Multimedia Teleschool, a new pedagogy has been developed. Fortnightly study letters are still delivered, but this is done electronically in the form of a file retrieved from a computer Host system by the student. In conjunction with the delivery of the fortnightly study letter, a one-hour live satellite broadcast takes place in which interviews with specialists in the Banking field take place (in English) and a variety of language acquisition activities are carried out. During these broadcasts the learners, situated in study centres located around Europe, are encouraged to interact with the tutors and guests in the television studio via a number of communication routes including telephone, facsimile, e-mail and through a computer conferencing system. Included in the range of activities provided during the broadcast sessions are competitive quizzes which require the students to produce the correct answers while working in their study centres and send these answers to the studio, and a series of questions which require written answers to be returned during the broadcast or to be returned later through the computer conferencing system.

In the periods between the satellite broadcasts, students work in two ways:

a) They complete their study letter activities individually.
b) They take part in a range of activities led by the tutors within the group-based computer conferencing system.

## TEACHING THE STUDENTS IN THE BERLITZ 'ENGLISH FOR BANKING' COURSE

### Learning Network Design Issues

Within the 'English for Banking' course, group interaction occurs in two ways:

i. Synchronously during the DBS broadcasts by feedback links via a range of technologies, including telephone, facsimile and electronic mail;
ii. Asynchronously within the CMCS system (Computer Mediated Communication System) throughout the duration of the course.

Synchronous group interaction raises few communication issues for tutors and learners, as the mix of broadcast television and telephone/facsimile/e-mail feedback loops fit well within standard conceptual structures which all participants have previously encountered, and all participants operate within synchronous environments in their daily lives.

The asynchronous communication systems, however, pose several communication and conceptual problems for many participants. People used to working within 'real' educational environments constructed from bricks and mortar find navigation through an essentially 'flat' digital environment, free from the constraints of both time and distance, somewhat difficult. Computer environments traditionally lack sufficient location cues and the very real problem of disorientation is commonplace.

Learning Network Design methodology has been developed[3] to assist with the construction of virtual organisations so that all participants working within these 'virtual worlds' can make sense of their new environment and effectively navigate through it.

As part of the course design, a visual metaphor (Fig.1) is developed by course designers and authors to act as an aid for participants and to ease some of the navigational problems which students encounter due to lack of visual cues within computer networks.

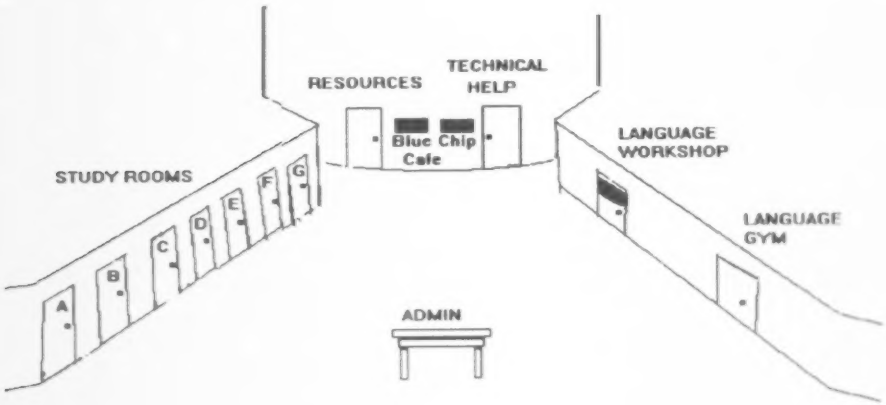



*Figure.1*: The Berlitz European Language Learning Centre

## GENERAL ORGANISATIONAL AND TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR TELEMATIC-BASED DISTANCE TEACHING

Many educational organisations are looking to implement more flexible teaching systems within their centre-based (on-site) offerings and within their Distance Education offerings.
At the same time, developments in IT and telecommunications are providing many opportunities for these organisations to implement telematic-based solutions to their teaching needs. The barriers to rapid implementation of these telematic-based solutions are not primarily technical, but organisational.

### Organisational Requirements

Distance Education has developed as a viable teaching/learning scenario within educational organisations. However, in many cases, organisational structures and systems have lagged behind the range of possibilities in telematic-based distance teaching. Large educational organisations suffer from inertia in the same way other large organisations do. There are many barriers to the introduction of courses designed so that students rarely, if ever, are physically on campus. Where there is little need for teachers to be on campus for much of the time and where teachers do not necessarily have to be located in close proximity to the educational establishment. In the case of the Berlitz course described, the tutors are, in fact, located at a specialist centre some 20 km away from the main administrative centre, but the tutors could be located anywhere in Europe.

There can be no doubt that two factors will assume increasing importance for educational organisations through and beyond the last part of this century:

a) The requirement for the provision of distance education will increase in response to the increasing difficulty which those in employment find attending 'traditional' part-time courses, the increasing mobility of populations, and the increasingly dynamic nature of many organisational structures. Many organisations, including educational establishments, have extended the need for employees to carry out 'on-the-job' training in order to develop or enhance required skills within changing structures.

b) Rapid advances in telecommunications will make more sophisticated technology available more widely at lower cost. These technologies will provide the communication tools on which to build the distance education programmes of the future.

**Technical Requirements**

Despite the limitations of the various technologies, through careful planning in pedagogical design and integration of existing communication technologies, together with the focused development of a range of technical systems, it is possible for a coherent provision to be made that will offer all the tools required for the delivery of fully-featured telematic distance education.

Of importance to future distance teacher training programme is the development of broad band telecommunication networks, which will allow the transfer of large amounts of data in acceptable time scales, the development of voice-annotated text and voice-annotated groupware tools, and the development of full multimedia communication networks which can offer a platform for rich communication forms including text, sound, voice, image, video and other multimedia elements.

## CONCLUSIONS

The delivery of the language courses, and the associated language teacher training programmes, for the first phase of the EC Multimedia Teleschool, have effectively demonstrated the appropriateness of telematic-based distance education for such purposes.

However, a cautious and balanced approach to the introduction of telematics should be taken. Outcomes have shown that the technological issues are not necessarily the most difficult to overcome. Technology has not been shown to be a constant limiting factor. Organisational and pedagogical issues are of prime importance and the need for careful planning, preparation and teacher training continue to dominate, as they do in all forms of educational design.

Charles Jennings

**MTS Project Partners involved in the 'English for Banking' course:** Audio Visual Centre, University College Dublin; Berlitz, Frankfurt; CECOMM, Southampton Institute; Condat, Berlin; EUROSTEP, Leiden; France Telecom, Montpellier; GATE-UPM, Madrid; IET, Thessaloniki; Katholieke Universeiteit, Leuven; La Sept, Paris; University College, London; Wissenschaftliches Institut für Kommunikationsdienste, Bad Honnef.

**NOTES**

1. Examples of some of the group-based computer conferencing activities:

Item 5 16-NOV-92 20:20
Opportunity
=== by Gerry Nolan<2cgeno@condat.uucp>on 16 Nov 92 07:47 GMT

Two words which are frequently used incorrectly are opportunity and possibility. As a very general tip, use the word opportunity as you could chance. Here are some examples:

Investors have the opportunity to invest in shares. I'm sorry but I didn't have the opportunity to call you. Living in Frankfurt allows you the opportunity to visit the stock exchange.

I want to see some more examples entered by YOU now. Give three sentences , one in the past, one in the present and one in the future, each using the word opportunity.

12 Discussion responses:-
5:1)Cecomm1 Porter(xporter) 17-NOV-92 1:45
=== by volker ochs<v2avooc_@condat/uucp>on 16 Nov 92 08:58 GMT

I hope I'll have the opportunity my next vacation in Canada.
I'm sorry, but I didn't have the opportunity to join the multimedia teleschool last week.
Do you have the opportunity to visit the "Dom" of Cologne?

---

5:2)Cecomm1 Porter(xporter) 20-NOV-92 1:45
=== by Ingeborg Delazer<2ainde_@condat.uucp> on 19 Nov 92 04:54 GMT

Several times I had the opportunity to visit Venice.
Have you ever had the opportunity to drive a Ferrari? (Sorry, this is present perfect!)
He will never have the opportunity to rise his standard of living.

---

5:3)Cecomm1 Porter(xporter) 21-NOV-092 1:45
===by karen keferstein<v2akaka_@condat.uucp> on 20 Nov 92 03:18 GMT

Did you have the opportunity to meet him?
He has the opportunity to learn something!
They will never get the opportunity to see this.

---

5:4)Pilar Gonzalez Perez(v1dpigon) 23-NOV-92 15:14

I didn't have the opportunity to visit my friends last summer.
Banks are the opportunity to make a lot of money.
We will have the opportunity to pass the difficult exams.

---

5:5)Cecomm1 Porter(xporter) 24-NOV-92 1:45
===by Gerry Nolan<v2cgeno@condat.uucp> on 23 Nov 92 02:49 GMT

Volker, your use of "opportunity" is good. When you are speaking about the teleschool, however, "participate in" is better than join. We use join when we become a member of something for the first time.

Inge, your (or one's) standard of living can rise or fall, but you (or "he") can raise (not rise) his standard. I will add a separate item on this point - it is worth practising.

---

5:6)Cecomm1 Porter(xporter) 24-NOV-92 1:45
=== by Tara Easton<v2ctaea@condat.uucp>on 23 Nov 92 07:04 GMT

' also be used to mean 'meet'
For example: I'll try to join you in the pub before eight o'clock.
He said he'd joint us as soon as he'd finished work.

'Join in' also means 'take part in'
For example: Everyone joined in with the dancing.
The more people who join in the efb_gym exercises, the better!

---

5:7)Cecomm1 Porter(xporter) 24-NOV-92 17:45
=== by Gerry Nolan<v2cgeno@condat/uucp>on 23 Nov 92 23:49 GMT

Good, Pilar, except the second sentence, you should say:
Banks HAVE the opportunity to make a lot of money.
OR: Banks provide people with the opportunity to make a lot of money (savings accounts, shares etc.)

2. Extract from the tutor training course outline

**Course Outline**

The course will follow up the face-to-face training which we have done and will help you become familiar with many of the features of CSCW (Computer-Supported Co-operative Work) software.

The *main* objective of the course is to give you the opportunity to explore the potential of this technology as one of the tools which you can use in your various teaching strategies.

**Course Timetable**

The course is divided into FIVE sections:

4 June - 10 June Introductory/Familiarisation Activities

11 June - 17 June Course Module 1 - Mastering the Basic Features

18 June - 24 June Course Module 2 Exploring the Advanced Features
Managing the Telematic Environment

25 June - 1 July Course Module 3 Managing Learning Groups

2 July - 9 July Course Module 4 Teaching/Learning Scenarios
Delivery of "Practice Lessons" by each Participant

3. Learning Network Design Methodology has been developed and defined at CECOMM. It has been found that the formal processes imposed by the application of the Structured Learning Network Design methodology, and the construction of a visual metaphor to represent the various components of the virtual organisation, helps the course providers to reconcile their pedagogical aims with the telematic environments within which their learners, tutors, and administrators will be working. Also, all actors who are operating within current group-oriented asynchronous telematic environments find that the visual metaphor representing their operating environment (which is, in fact, simply a computer file structure) offers them a valuable navigation aid as they move within their virtual world.

**REFERENCES**

Davies R N S. 1992. Multimedia Teleschool Functionalities and Pedagogical Scenarios, Delta Project 2021 Report, DGXIII, European Community.

Davies R N S and Jennings J C H. 1991. Distributed Learning Systems: telecommunications, telematics and organisations, Proceedings of Current and Future Developments and Applications of Technology-Based Training: Networks and Telecoms, Coventry, UK.

## Rapporteur's Summary

### General Discussion

Pedagogical and practical issues were highlighted. With regard to the former, it was acknowledged that while quantitative information could be easily obtained regarding participants' levels of interaction for any given period, qualitative data was not as accessible. In fact, a 'traditional' approach was required to get this information. Another related concern was that the 'navigation guides' can impose an authoritarian style to the learning/interacting process. In responding, the comment was made that in every teaching/learning situation, guidelines are given; in other words, the environment has to be 'managed' in order to produce the required outcomes. Furthermore, attention was drawn to the fact that the approach used in the Berlitz English course is only one of several and that flexibility was the operative word in the process of providing services. Consequently, for other courses, other approaches could be employed.

From a practical perspective, the fact that 'private messages' can be transmitted allayed fears of invasiveness. With regard to users operating the system in languages other than English, it was noted that stress patterns, etc. were provided. It was pointed out that aspects of the English course content (eg the language gym.) contained a variety of tasks/activities thereby providing options.

### Concluding comments

The presentation brought to the fore one of the most recent technological innovations in the area of distance education. The major obstacle to generalized implementation appears to be cost. However, there appeared to be general acceptance among the group that, in the absence of economic constraints, Telematics was a feasible option in the quest to find appropriate pathways for distance education.

Winnifred Hall

# THE USE OF SATELLITES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

The presentation opened with a brief personal introduction, followed by a short description of the context in Wales. The presenter, Terry Brockley, gave an outline of his talk: part one deals with an introduction to satellite-assisted learning (SAL) or training. Part two indicates the use of satellites in distance education in Gwynedd (Wales). In the final part, a number of anticipated future applications are mentioned.

The benefits of the use of satellite in teaching and learning environments are varied. Through the Olympus satellite, programme makers and programme users found that they had new resources for the classroom. Some of these will be described in this presentation.

Essentially, there are two contrasting types of communication satellite; a fixed satellite which will receive transmissions and illuminates a particular area. It has a permanency. Remote sensing satellites are used for collecting information as used in weather satellites.

## OVERVIEW

Satellite assisted learning (SAL) may occupy a continuum which includes the use of satellites as a medium (enables), a catalyst (creates) or as a resource (provides). As a catalyst, it may develop increased interactivity between students and open up a significant number of provider networks. As a resource or provider it offers opportunities for things like language learning or simply providing data consisting of thousands of words, which may in turn be distributed to thousands of locations. (see Figure 1)

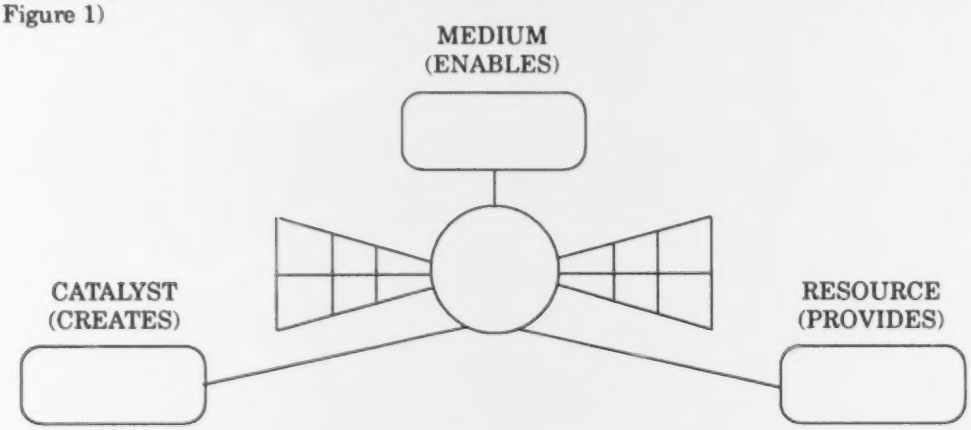



*Figure 1*

### Processes

In using SAL, one must be aware of different processes taking place. These relate to the following three interest groups in this domain:

1. Users (demands and supplies).
2. Providers (demands and supplies).
3. Facilitators.

There are considerations relating to each of the interested groups:

1. Needs awareness raising to the possibilities.
2. New opportunities and new technologies.
3. Infrastructure, networking and associations.

What needs to be kept in mind is that a lot of what is discussed here is old technology and is becoming much cheaper to access as the pace of change continues unabated.

The challenges
What are the challenges for linguistics in using this technology?

Three need to-be addressed:

1. Help student learning.
2. Increase student motivation.
3. Improve student performance.

All of which are tied in with the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.
A distinction needs to be made between the two terms 'broadcasting' with which we are all familiar, and which simply means that the picture is sent to the satellite and is then available to all, irrespective of needs. Commercial school broadcasters look for the largest possible audience. 'Narrowcasting' refers to meeting the needs of particular viewing groups. Narrowcasters are looking for the committed audience with a real need to be involved. The restrictions can be seen from the diagram (see Figure 2). The satellite assisted learning project in Gwynedd was oriented towards maximising interaction in real time (see diagram: Figure 4 - box in far right).

## SATELLITE ASSISTED LEARNING IN GWYNEDD AUTHORITY

After a short description of the context, which highlighted the communication difficulties and the considerable number of very small schools, coupled with considerations of equal opportunities and equal access for all, the option for distance learning through satellite was made because of its flexibility. Using this mode of education was in itself an evolutionary process of learning for those participating, either as providers or receivers. The description which follows will bring out the evolutionary style of the project.

**SATELLITE ASSISTED LEARNING**

| | BROADCASTING | | NARROW CASTING | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| MODE OF LEARNING | PROGRAMME PROVIDER | PROGRAMME USER | PROGRAMME PROVIDER | PROGRAMME USER |
| PASSIVE | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| INTERACTICE (LAPSED TIME) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| INTERACTIVE (REAL TIME) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

*Figure 2*

The educational reasons put forward to the education authorities are as follows.

a) Increases student's own responsibility for learning

b) Improves their communication skills and other personal competences

c) Strengthens the notion of learning by doing

d) Demonstrates the effectiveness of new technologies

e) Encourages teachers to try alternative methods to traditional didactic teaching

There were practical considerations to be addressed, as well.

a) Falling student rolls

b) Shortages of specialist staff

c) Shortages of equipment

d) Need to modernise the curriculum

e) Need to ensure entitlement curriculum

f) Bilingual considerations

Moving into distance learning, the following elements in the package may be included:

(i) recognised course, or programme of study
(ii) well prepared student materials, assignments, practical exercises
(iii) telephone counselling
(iv) audio conferencing
(v) telewriting
(vi) interactive video and video support materials
(vii) viewdata support
(viii) satellite use (Olympus)

At this point, a video demonstration of (iv) audio conferencing took place, where students were linked with a local employer discussing the place of Welsh in the context of the EC. Audio conferencing underpins all of SAL undertaking being done by the Authority. In the case of A-level students, instead of simply one day's contact per week, now they could be in touch with tutors more frequently. Although audio conferencing provided an opportunity for greater contact, students wanted more visual content. This led to the use of telewriting (VI on the list above). Once again, a video demonstration showed students working with a tutor on a science lesson through the medium of Welsh, using a television to show a diagram. By means of both audio conferencing and telewriting, along with written packages and pastoral support, several hundred students were able to study full courses leading to A-levels. One of the encouraging outcomes was that in most cases students scored higher grades than in other subjects. Since then, the technology has moved on two generations.

The next move was to the use of satellite (VIII on the list above), where not only could students talk, and write, but now could see the tutor (see diagram Figure 3). Audio conferencing is an essential element in this kind of transmission, which links programme viewers with the television studios during live broadcasts, thus increasing viewer participation and motivation. In using this mode, three possible levels of interaction were made possible (see Figure 4). This use of satellite

was demonstrated on video, where students learning Japanese were linked with a tutor in London, enabling them to have two-way immediate interaction.

**Issues addressed**

Having piloted the project, starting with materials and moving on to modes of linking and interaction, a number of issues needed to be addressed. The Welsh Office provided funding for a network of satellite receiver sites, and an academic video conferencing network had also been established, some time before. Both needed to be explored for their potential, not only for students but also for community education.

From January to April 1993, seventy hours of satellite programmes were piloted, using the networks and transmitted directly to schools in Wales. The nature of the programmes can be seen from the table (see Figure 5). Referring back to the needs of the users, one way to raise awareness was to transmit rugby coaching programmes live and direct to schools. Creating interest and use in this way gave the users an awareness of the potentialities of using satellite for other subjects (eg electronics, natural economy, etc). This was activated on two hundred sites and the demand was evident.

Another application was its use for in-service training (Inset) for modern foreign language teachers. In the age of local management of schools (LMS), funding for Inset has been reduced and, consequently, teachers are not being released for external short courses.This mode of interaction through satellite is a way of putting Inset back into the school.

Other examples of the applications of this technology included Countryside Conservation getting the message across to school groups on nature outings about the Do's and Don'ts of conserving the countryside. The Medical School in Cardiff was also able to use the network to update General Practitioners (GPs) on topics such as AIDS. British Gas have also shown an interest in using this kind of educational delivery to reach personnel working on the rigs. An initial evaluation showed that the schools using the network were very pleased with the outcomes (see above in relation to A-level results).

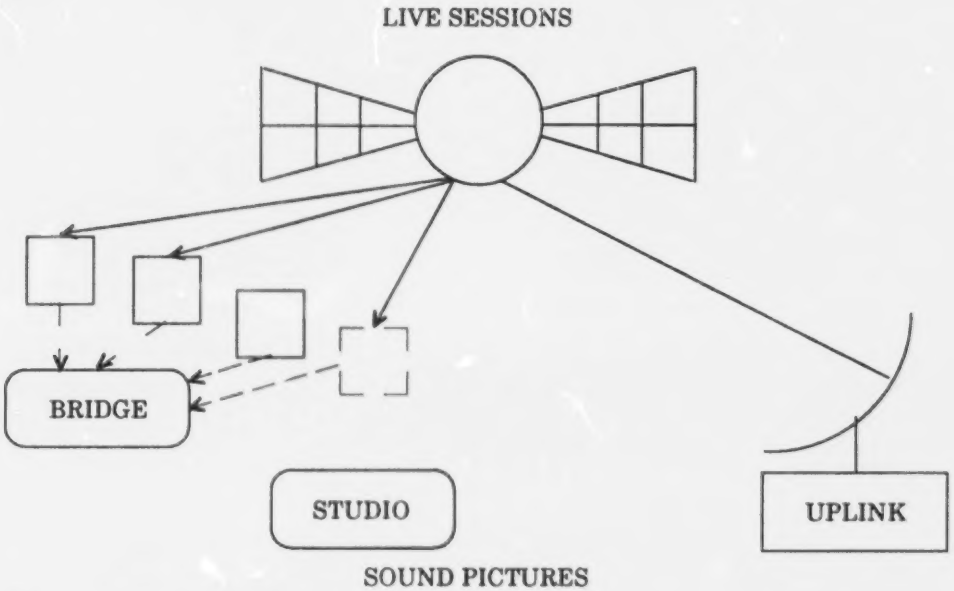



*Figure 3*

**TRAINING DELIVERY MODEL**
**DIAGRAM 2**

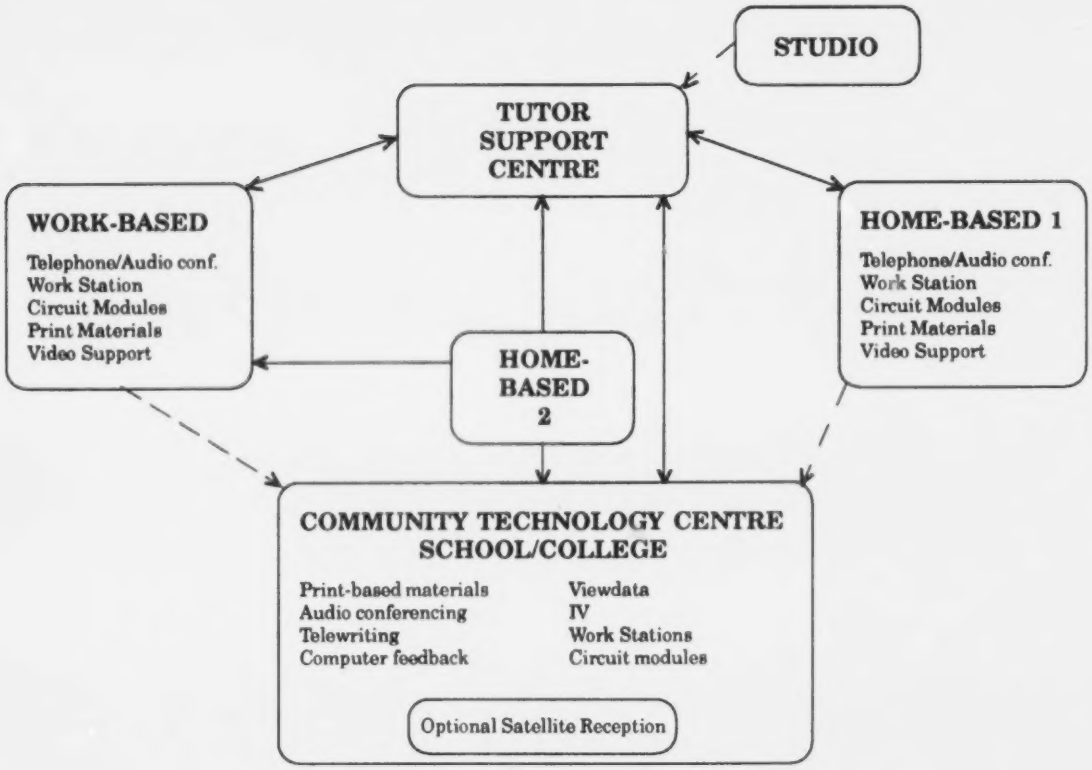



*Figure 4*

**WELSH SATELLITE CHANNEL SCHEDULE UP TO APRIL 1993**

Channel - Olympus 12.570GHz

| DAY | DATE | PROGRAMME PROVIDER | PROGRAMME | TIME |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Friday | 8 Jan 1993 | Welsh Rugby Union | Coaching Programme 1 | 12.45 -13.45<br>14.15 - 15.15 |
| Monday | 11 Jan 1993 | Gwynedd LEA | Electronics Prog.1 | 11.15 - 12.15 |
| Friday | 22 Jan 1993 | Welsh Rugby | Coaching Programme 2 | 12.45 - 13.45 |
| Friday | 22 Jan 1993 | Tape play-out X33/02 | Introduction to Natural Economy | 13.45 - 14.15<br>13.45 - 14.15 |
| Friday | 22 Jan 1993 | Welsh Rugby Union | Coaching Programme 2 | 14.15 - 15.15 |
| Monday | 25 Jan 1993 | Gwynedd LE | Electronics Prog 2 | 11.15 - 12.15 |
| Monday | 25 Jan 1993 | British Gas | Test Transmission | 13.00 - 13.45 |
| Monday | 25 Jan 1993 | Education Dept UCNW | Gwynedd Schools Link | 14.00 - 15.15 |
| Friday | 5 Feb 1993 | Welsh Rugby Union | Coaching Programme 3 | 12.45 - 13.45 |
| Friday | 5 Feb 1993 | Tape play-out X33/028 | Background to Natural Economy | 13.45 - 14.15 |
| Friday | 5 Feb 1993 | Welsh Rugby Union | Coaching Programme 3 | 14.15 - 15.15 |
| Monday | 8 Feb 1993 | Education Dept UCNW | Gwynedd Schools Links | 13.15 - 13.45 |
| Monday | 8 Feb 1993 | Eurotransmed | Series for Local GPs | 14.00 - 15.15 |
| Friday | 19 Feb 1993 | Welsh Rugby Union | Coaching Programme 4 | 12.45 - 13.45 |
| Friday | 19 Feb 1993 | Tape playout X33/028 | Ethnoecology & Agrarianism - Natural Economy | 13.45 - 14.15 |
| Friday | 19 Feb 1993 | Welsh Rugby Union | Coaching Programme 4 | 14.15 - 15.15 |
| Monday* | 22 Feb 1993 | Gwynedd LEA | Electronics Prog 3 | 11.15 - 12.15 |
| Monday | 22 Feb 1993 | Tape playout SOBA | Modern Language INSET 1 | 12.15 - 13.15 |

Figure 5

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The use of SAL is gaining momentum and it is possible to anticipate future developments and trends. The emphasis on narrowcasting will grow, often dependent on old telecommunication technologies.

In September 1993, another set of programmes onA'-level and other subjects (eg sociology, electronics, RSA vocational courses) will be transmitted. This time, schools will be charged for participation. There are plans to include more rugby coaching programmes as well as Spanish (linked with the Lingua programme).An interesting pilot targets women returners (to employment) using the network to teach electronics. This is also linked with Spain, Greece and Ireland. Another series is planned by the Countryside Council of Wales. The training delivery model is illustrated below. Additional benefits of using the system is that students' progress may be logged and then downloaded to a host computer. Assessment and reporting may be carried out from the downloaded information.

Looking further into the future, effective compression of video signals is another exciting development which will reduce the existing high costs of using satellite transmissions. Transactional links and networks are obviously increasing. There are plans, in conjunction with a Lingua project in Poitiers, for downloading data. Data compression is also on the horizon where large amounts of data (eg textbooks) may be encoded and decoded over a network. This has been termed 'exporting libraries'.

All of these interesting innovations are taking place in Wales!

Discussion was limited to clarification about the multipoint basis of the Welsh network described. Concern was expressed about the role of the teachers/tutors and the dangers of schools choosing the cheaper option. In response, it was pointed out that students were, in fact, staying in schools in preference to going to Further Education colleges (FE). The 'knock-on' effect, especially in physics and mathematics, was that the services of teachers was required more than ever. The issue of cost was also raised, but left to the afternoon discussion where it was dealt with in greater depth.

Terry Brockley (Presenter)
Kevin Germaine (Rapporteur)

# BBC WORLD SERVICE TELEVISION PRESENTATION

BBC WSTV was launched with the mission of being the equivalent of BBC WSR on television. BBC WSTV, therefore carries on all the highly respected journalistic values that have exemplified World Service Radio over the past 60 years: Values which include a commitment to ACCURACY, IMPARTIALITY, QUALITY and OBJECTIVITY.

The fundamental difference between BBC World Service Television and World Service Radio lies in the funding. BBC World Service Television is entirely self-funding and receives no financial support from either the British TV Licence fee or the British Government. WSTV therefore is required to derive its revenue from commercial sources eg Advertising in Asia and Subscriptions in Africa and Europe. This is not to say, however, that WSTV is a profit-making organisation. Revenue generated is used for investment into the service as a whole.

WSTV has the privilege of enjoying the enormous brand recognition of the BBC and all the positive associations that go hand in hand with that name. It is therefore of paramount importance that the programming produced by WSTV is correspondent to the strength of that BBC brand and carries with it the distinctive values associated with BBC journalism throughout the world.

WSTV employs approximately 30 staff mainly involved in the business development/ sales/ administration. The actual programming requirements in terms of News Weather and Presentation are contracted directly from the BBC.

WSTV draws on the unequalled news gathering resources of the BBC throughout the world, combining the journalistic expertise of BBC TV, BBC News and Current Affairs, and World Service Radio. The world-wide news gathering BBC network includes 200 correspondents and 50 bureaux overseas. WSTV pulls these resources together and produces its news programming in its own London newsroom, and compiles and schedules the Channel as a whole. It is essential in all this, and really relates back to the preservation and protection of the BBC name and values, that WSTV retains editorial control over the channel at all times. A reputation of trust built up over 60 years could be damaged forever if there were any compromise over this.

News bulletins are broadcast on the hour every hour and form part of the first half hour; this is known in-house as the News half hour. This half hour consists of the News on the hour, followed by 12 minutes of Business News, 3 minutes of Weather and then a return to News Headlines.

During the second half hour, the News is supported by the BBC's renowned programming strength in the areas of Current Affairs, factual and lighter lifestyle programming. More on that later.

How do we get this service across the world? Quite simply, via satellite. We are currently broadcasting via various satellites into various regions. A series of regional partnerships have been developed which enable us to provide a market led approach to the distribution and sales of the WSTV channel. While WSTV retains full editorial control, the regional partner is expected to bring knowledge and experience of the respective markets and commercial expertise in terms of distributing and marketing the service to the region. Our partners have, therefore, been carefully selected to provide WSTV with the regional commercial drive which is so essential to our survival, while at the same time being required to understand WSTV's basic necessity to retain editorial control and at all times take editorial decisions that are journalistically driven according to BBC principles and not commercially driven.

WSTV is looking to build on its developing strength by the introduction of new channels, including an educational channel. However, WSTV is currently being utilised as an educational tool. Research is telling us that from an educational point of view, the WSTV channel is being used for the most

part, as one might expect, as a means of enhancing English Language Teaching and Learning. But over and above this obvious use, let's go back to the long form programming that I mentioned before.

The programmes currently scheduled in the second half of the hour come from the domestic output of the BBC and are predominantly factual/lifestyle programmes - these range from 'Horizon' (for the benefit of those of you from abroad, this is a science documentary series that takes an analytical and contemporary approach to the world around us); 'Tomorrow's World' which is aimed at the younger age group and takes a look at modern day inventions and their potential impact on society to 'Assignment', a current affairs discussion programme that takes an analytical approach to world events.
The educational value of these programmes is increasingly being recognised. We are increasingly receiving correspondence from teachers and tutors throughout our satellite footprints who are utilising these long form programmes as a basis for stimulating discussion on broader issues or as a discussion point in themselves. I have brought a booklet which was compiled by our regional partner for Asia, STAR TV, promoting these programmes as educational tools.

I have heard from British Councils in various African countries which have set up a TV monitor in their libraries, allowing those using the library to have access to BBC transmissions.

In Italy, teachers utilise the programming on our European service which, remember, is a general entertainment channel including Children's TV in its schedules, as a means of not only enhancing the aural comprehension of their pupils, but also creating further awareness of English Culture.

It must be remembered that these are early days in the development of WSTV. As mentioned before, we are planning to launch new channels, of which it is anticipated that one shall be Educational. In the meantime, however, it will be necessary to be creative in utilising the current WSTV channel from an educational perspective and it is becoming increasingly evident that there are ways in which the current service can be applied to the educational arena.

Over the next few years, the advent of digital technology, which in essence will mean that numerous channels will be available using the same amount of information as is currently utilised for the broadcast of one channel, will change the face of broadcasting and we can look forward to an ever increasing number of niche channels being made available. WSTV plans to be very much at the forefront of these developments, thereby introducing an increasing number of channels, and I am sure an Educational Channel will be introduced in due course.

Luisa Ruddiford

# RAPPORTEUR'S SUMMARY

## 1 Discussion

After the presentation given above, the presenter responded to questions on the following issues:

Spanish service in South America. BBC TV is of the opinion that broadcasting to South America should be in Spanish. Arrangements with possible distributors still need to be negotiated too.

Use of Mandarin in China. Satellite facilities are mainly in the big expensive hotels. Do you have any figures on audience? No figures yet on number of viewers but reports from one government department suggest that there is an increasing audience for BBC WSTV.

Botswana. What is involved to obtain M -NET service? M -NET service is a private broadcasting station. Understandably, governments are concerned. There have not been any private broadcasters before. The Ministry of Information granted permission, and broadcasting through M-NET began. Through similar agreements, broadcasting to Ghana, Uganda and Nigeria should soon begin.

Caribbean - why no service there? It should be possible to receive the signal via Canada. However, receivers should use a decoder.

What is likely to be the future of the World Service Radio as WSTV increases its contact? There might be a decline in listenership to begin with but the radio service has a grant-in-aid to guarantee its service, unlike BBC WSTV.

Moses Mukabeta (Rapporteur)

# BBC ENGLISH WORKSHOP

BBC English has been teaching by radio for 50 years. With the addition of TV, video and publications, we feel justified in calling ourselves the biggest classroom in the world.

Our broadcasting expertise includes:

- Knowledge of what makes a good radio programme.
- Knowledge of what makes a good teaching programme.
- Knowledge of how to get the message across through direct and indirect broadcasting including satellite distribution.

- The production of relevant and appropriate support material in the form of notes both simple and elaborate, as well as printed books and cassettes.

- Our range of programmes. Hundreds of series covering all possible types of interests from sport to song and lore to literature. The differing levels go from almost beginner level to advanced and touch on teaching matters and concerns, business topics and the news.

- We work with over 39 language sections in Bush House, using their language expertise as well as their cultural and political knowhow.

- We have access to the whole of the BBC's archives and data system and work with the most sophisticated equipment (or the opposite where necessary).

With the change in broadcasting patterns and listening habits, we have shifted our focus from direct to indirect broadcasting:

- Through local radio stations.
- Through satellite into local stations.

- We have also moved further into working on projects based on the needs of learners and teachers on the ground and together with the British Council and ODA have developed locally made and initiated projects.

- We have also invested in training producers from other countries in the arts and skills of making English teaching programmes.

Chris Faram
Hamish Norbrook
Frances Cox

# BBC ENGLISH WORKSHOP

**Task**

Please consider and discuss the following:

1. What would be the ideal means of distribution of your 'customized' programmes, eg radio (national, local, educational channel?) Cassettes to schools/teachers' centres? How would you see the broadcasting pattern, ie times of broadcast, frequency of broadcast, etc?

2. How would you 'customize' the programme for your target audience?
   eg translation, cultural and linguistic appropriacy, additional recorded material (drama, listener involvement, interviews, authentic material, etc).

3. Support material: what form should this take, ie notes, booklets, cassettes, scripts, tests, transcripts in newspapers. How would it be disseminated? Who would be responsible?

4. Follow-up and evaluation: How would you approach this?

## RAPPORTEUR'S SUMMARY

BBC English has been teaching English through radio for 50 years and has amassed not only a considerable range of teaching programmes but also a fund of expertise and knowledge in this medium.

Since BBC English operates on a large scale and aims at a global audience, it is impossible for its programme makers to define the language demands and levels of their target audience. The feedback they can get from learners is rather limited. Therefore, they are more on the nonformal end of distance education.

Some changes in BBC English, emphasised by the BBC presentation team, have brought a new dimension to BBC English. These changes have certainly made BBC English work more closely with ELT and move more centrally into the field of distance education.

The Core Curriculum, based on the Council of Europe specifications for Waystage and Threshold 90, links the BBC English with the existing ELT examinations. The new English teaching project 'Look ahead', is a collaborative venture between BBC English, the British Council, Cambridge Examinations and Longman ELT, aiming at helping prepare for two Cambridge Examinations - the key English Test and the Preliminary English Test.

The BBC English has also moved further into working on projects based on the needs of learners and teachers on the ground and, together with the British Council and ODA, have developed locally made and initiated projects. The Namibia project presented at the seminar is one of them, which is also a training project. The assumption is that the local producers should be able to carry on and make their own programmes.

This new mode of working with local partners from different countries on the ground helps to customize BBC English programmes for a particular group of audience and tailor them to meet the needs of local learners. The co-operation between BBC English and local partners takes place in several countries, such as: Russia, Mongolia, Malaysia, Cambodia, India, etc.

The traditional presentation format of the BBC English radio programme is Drama and Narration/ Explanation. BBC producers want to bridge the gap between the tension created by the drama and the narration. An excerpt from a new radio series 'A Ride with George' was shown to demonstrate a new way of presenting an English teaching drama series, and was felt to be refreshing.

Along with the production of the new series 'Look Ahead', BBC English has also prepared to advise radio stations of the best way of adapting the programmes in order to meet the needs of the local listeners including consideration of their language, culture and learning needs. In order to draw on the experience in ELT of the participants, towards the end of the presentation, the BBC team demonstrated a sample programme of the radio version of 'Look Ahead', which is basically aimed at teaching and practising the simple past tense. The participants were given the task of customizing the programme for a certain target audience.

The task gave rise to a heated discussion about the nature of the cultural input of the ELT programmes made by the BBC as a whole. Some felt strongly that BBC English programmes are very much Euro-centred with obsessive interest in the western way of life, and therefore it is virtually impossible to adapt the programmes. The sexual innuendo suggested in the programme was the focus of criticism. Some participants also expressed worries about the image of the West promoted by the BBC English.

Other participants argued that it is patronising to think that we know best about the needs of different types of learners from diversing cultural backgrounds. It is impossible to make programmes which are globally acceptable. It seems a good idea for the BBC to supply the local partner with the core of the programmes, complete scripts and some advice, and leave the task of 'customization' to the local partners.

The discussion was fruitful since developing ET programmes which are both linguistically correct and culturally appropriate has always been a big issue. However, the cultural matter seemed to dominate the discussion, with the linguistic side being neglected.

Liu Dailin

# APPROPRIACY OF DISTANCE LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES FOR PARTICULAR GROUPS OF LEARNERS AND COUNTRIES

Seminar participants divided themselves into the following groups to consider the possibility of using the distance technologies described by Anita Pincas, Charles Jenning and Terry Brockley:

**Group 1:**

teacher training in countries where there is reasonably easy access to technology, eg. most of Western Europe, North America and Japan.

This group felt that distance learning technologies such as satellite and computer conferencing could widen access to education, and provide learners with access to the whole world of information. They welcomed the flexibility of time and location, and considered how Hypertext might be used to help learners find pathways and structure their learning. Ted Nelson (1981) describes a world in which **Hypertext** is used to provide access to worlds of information electronically. This access is non linear, that is to say, the reader can circle around texts which are annotated electronically, with the following types of annotation:

1. Annotations which provide simple definitions, or translations. These are particularly helpful for language learners.
2. Annotations which provide more detailed information. A learner can read a single paragraph covering the essentials of a subject, and then click a computer mouse button over the key word for a level which they wish to explore further.
3. Annotations which link a paragraph in one document to others written by other writers.

Annotations can be text, pictures, sound or video. The reader can add his or her own annotations for personal future use or for the next reader. Text writing in this world would become increasingly collaborative. Despite some of the grandiose claims made for hypertext, it actually does little more than what experienced readers do already. What it does do is similar to what the word processor does for writing: it automates parts of the process, enhances presentation of material, and is likely to increase the volume of texts available.

The group felt that distance learning technologies and areas such as hypertext would provide the need for, and opportunities for research into learning styles and how to design learning systems which would work with these learning styles.

The group remained concerned about the cost of distance learning technologies, even in countries where there is reasonably easy access to technologies and more resources available overall. They feel it is important to address issues such as health problems associated with using certain technologies such as RSI (Repetitive Stress Injury) caused by incorrect and excessive use of computer keyboards.

**Group 2:**

teacher training in countries where there is some access to technology, and where this is increasing, eg. eastern and central Europe, South America.

The group felt that technology could be used to widen access to training and would be useful for organising the training environment. They felt that technology could be particularly helpful for helping teachers gain access to professional texts which would normally be unavailable to those without hard currency.

They also felt that using technology would help 'upskill' all those involved, provide support for isolated teachers, expand opportunities for language development, and expand the context of language learning. They felt that computer mediated conferencing in particular would provide social interaction to 'isolates'. They remained concerned at the initial costs of technology, and the fact that equipment and systems can become obsolescent so quickly. They felt that it would be difficult to predict and cater for different patterns of use. They feared that pedagogy would be driven by the glamour of technology, and opportunities for the **complementary** use of technology in existing systems ignored. There was also the danger that trainers and learners would be hostile or afraid of technology, this would be with good reason if staff numbers were cut after the introduction of technologies for teaching. They were also concerned about the dangers of computer sabotage such as computer viruses which can be introduced by careless or malignant individuals and can lead to loss of data. Charles Jenning pointed out that most computer mediated conferencing systems have stringent security systems to avoid these problems.

In common with Group 1, Group 2 felt there was a need for research, particularly into the discourse involved in computer mediated conferencing.

**Group 3:**

teacher training in countries where access to technology is difficult: eg. many developing countries in Africa and Asia.

This group considered the use of technology in contexts which are financially and technically difficult. The group contrasted the trends in western countries towards using technology for working and shopping at home and questioned whether there was any common ground between this easy access to technology and the situation in developing countries.

They were concerned that computers and satellites could become the new language laboratories: introduced without adequate needs analysis, technical and financial support, and based on inadequate pedagogy and technical solutions. They were worried that "high tech" solutions would be preferred to lower tech solutions such as cassette recorders.

They wondered whether high tech solutions were sensible solutions to the post-Jomtien priorities of focusing on primary education in developing countries.

**Group 4:**

provision of ELT and skills to learners in countries in which there is some access to technology as described for Group 2.

The group considered the following issues:

1. Electronic mail. This would be relevant if users could have affordable access using low priced gateways.
2. 'High tech' systems such as multimedia might be difficult to deliver to end users. Problems are exacerbated by technophobia among teachers and decision makers.
3. Difficulties in matching form and content, especially when there is an absence of sound pedagogical principles.
4. Technology is becoming more user friendly.
5. Technology can be particularly helpful when learners have no direct contact with native speakers of the language. However, how 'authentic' is the language provided? The interaction may not be as realistic as claimed.
6. As technologies develop and are used there may be job cuts, indeed managers and governments may only support the investment in technology if it is seen as cost effective. The easiest way to save money is to cut back on jobs.

## Conclusion

All the participants felt it was difficult to make informed decisions about technology which was constantly developing, and particularly in an educational context where financial resources are limited. They were intrigued by issues such as censorship: should one try to censor pornography, offensive comments which are racist or sexist, and how? Charles Jenning pointed out that this can be dealt with informally as in a real classroom, with the teacher or trainer taking the offender aside for a quiet word. Where this does not work, sanctions such as exclusion will have to be considered.

The governments of some countries often try to control access to technologies such as satellite systems and electronic mail by straightforward bans or punitive taxation. In other countries where there are limited resources for good quality programming on terrestrial television, access to satellite television has effectively 'killed off' the audiences for national television stations. Satellite broadcasting (as opposed to the narrow casting described in Terry Brockley's paper) can extend access to the target language. The problem can be that multinational broadcasting can often provide material which is culturally inappropriate for many of the viewers. There are parallels here between entertainment and education.

Caroline Moore

References

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# LANGUAGE ISSUES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

**What have we learnt and where are we going?**

**Preliminaries**

This paper is the product of a Rapporteurs' report back session which formed the final session of the 1993 Dunford Seminar. Rapporteurs for each of the topic areas covered during the seminar were asked to review the sessions for which they had been rapporteurs, and to guide the participants towards discussion of likely new directions which might develop in Distance Education relating to language issues. The remainder of this paper is an account of participants' ideas relating to these possible new directions. (A list of rapporteurs and the sessions on which they reported can be found in the seminar programme in the Appendix.)

The seminar was structured around two very basic areas of interest in Distance Education, ie, firstly, educational sub-sectors and secondly, means of delivery. Sub-sectors covered were secondary, tertiary, teacher-training and non-formal, and means covered were materials design, conventional broadcasting, costing Distance Education options and the opportunities presented by new technology.

**Tertiary and Secondary**

Discussion revealed that nearly all the new directions envisioned for the tertiary and secondary sectors were very closely related and included:-

(1) An increased exploitation of the potential offered by learning through a mix of media ('pluri-modality') whether print, broadcasting by radio and/or TV, use of pre-recorded audio and/or video material, telephone, new technology etc.

(2) An increase in the use of new technology, whether teleconferencing, satellite narrowcasting, interactive video or whatever new technology may develop.

(3) Resulting from (1) and (2) above a new body of expertise amongst materials writers to exploit the opportunities offered by the new technology, in association with existing materials production methods.

(4) Materials developed for non-language teaching topics will increasingly build language learning into their subject materials as an integral, not add-on element of the instruction package.

(5) As a complement to (4) above learning programme designers will increasingly include direct teaching of language as an essential support for non-language learning subjects.

(6) To render instructional packages at the tertiary and secondary levels cost-effective there will be an increased number of consortia.

(7) As a result of (6) above materials will have to contend with two opposing forces. Firstly there will be pressure from consortia to reduce unit costs by 'internationalising' materials so that they are acceptable to as many markets as possible. Secondly, there will be pressure from end-users (foreign governments and students) to make materials culturally and pedagogically suitable for them specifically. Provided materials will vary between the range of responses suggested by these forces.

(8) Increased numbers of consortia and the internationalisation of learning will lead to an increase in modularisation and the use of credit transfer systems.

(9) An issue which was seen as having specific relevance to the secondary sector was the expected increase in the use of Distance Methods in ELT for cross-curricular purposes.

**Teacher Training**

Distance techniques in the training of language teachers were seen as having considerable potential advantages over non-distance methods and because of these advantages, together with perceived economies, it was felt that teacher education by distance was going to grow even more rapidly that it has already done in the last few years both in the UK and overseas. Reasons given by participants for this projected growth were:-

(1) Teacher education at a distance will allow teachers to remain in the workplace during training and thus allow them to apply new ideas immediately to their classroom, to conduct research using immediately available data and to avoid depletion of national staff strength while absent on overseas training.

(2) Distance TT will involve trainees learning not only the substance of their instructional programme but also the necessary study skills involved in this and will thus be an instrument of teacher improvement in national human resource development within and beyond the education sector.

(3) Distance TT courses will use the fact of the trainees being in daily contact with his or her class to incorporate assessment of actual teaching ability into the overall assessment scheme by relating study tasks to day-to-day teaching duties.

(4) Distance TT will integrate the new technology into instructional programmes with caution, proceeding from the readily accessible to the more esoteric to ensure that fear of technology does not interfere.

(5) Distance TT will, by making new technology available to an important sector of society, not only empower teachers but contribute to national development through a more widespread understanding, use of and demand for, modern communications technology.

**Non-formal Education**

(1) The participants felt that Distance Learning for Non-formal Education would enjoy an expanding future as part of the post-Jomtien interest of ILO's in large scale Basic Education programmes.

(2) The need for economies of scale together with the commitment of ILO's to national, rather than regional development, would ensure that DL Non-formal programmes would be large in size.

(3) New Technology in the form of cheaper local radio transmitters, cheaper satellite reception equipment associated with higher-powered satellites and the development of narrow-casting, higher production quality via Desk Top Publishing etc for rural newspapers in local languages will all improve the quality of access to Non-formal Education by Distance and reinforce literacy skills learnt.

(4) Non-formal Education will use study groups increasingly as a means to support the associated language learning needs of students.

(5) Together with plans to target large numbers, Distance Learning in Non-formal Education will seek to address the wide variation in effectiveness of current literacy programmes by increased use of assessment and evaluation techniques and by corrective measures based on the findings of these techniques.

**Materials Writing**

Participants felt that:

(1) With the integration of Language Learning into the Education Sector of ILO lending, Distance Materials would inevitably be part or parts of multi-disciplinary programmes rather than stand-alones.

(2) In a climate of increasing attention to costs and a plethora of existing high quality products, ways could be found to adapt existing materials to new environments rather than starting from scratch.

(3) Developments in the field of educational psychology would impact on the style and content of materials production for Distance Language Learning programmes and this would cause an improvement in the effectiveness with which the varying cognitive styles of learners would be addressed.

(4) The outcome of (3) above would be an increase in "multi-channel" approaches to language issues in Distance Learning whereby skills would be imparted via a wide variety of techniques and presentation styles.

(5) Interest in Distance Learning by ILOs would lead to more funds being available for materials production and, in consequence, the quality, not only in terms of content but also in terms of physical production, of materials would improve significantly.

**Broadcasting**

Two sessions of the Dunford 93 seminar were devoted to broadcasting and it is for this reason that participants' judgements as to likely new directions in this area are listed below in this section. However, participants generally felt that broadcasting was not really a discreet topic area but was another form of materials production disseminated through the airwaves. Participants felt that:-

(1) The future will bring more international collaboration in language learning through broadcasting in terms of delivery systems and materials production. Participants wondered if, as a consequence of this, third-world skills might not be stifled by international consortia.

(2) The international collaboration envisaged in (1) above would lead to two conflicting tendencies ie, firstly that there would be more cross-cultural awareness and secondly that cultural imperialism by international consortia would tend to ride roughshod over local sensibilities. Participants saw future language learning related broadcasting veering between these two poles.

(3) In order to market more successfully, companies will undertake and make better use of market research.

(4) A probable consequence of (3) above will be an increase in 'narrowcasting' via satellite whereby very specific audiences can be targeted with specially designed materials.

(5) The penetration of broadcasting will become more widespread and more intense and will form a significant part of the "cultural backdrop" of more and more countries.

(6) There was a danger that in the longer term the current and impending glut of broadcasting educational programmes might be rationalised by the well-established process of the concentration of capital into a rather restricted range of options which would neglect less prominent minorities.

**Costing**

The question of costing was considered of vital importance by participants in considering what developments might occur in the means of delivery of Distance Language Learning programmes. Participants felt that:-

(1) The combined pressure of increasingly restricted budgets and ever higher governmental expectations would inevitably lead to a more exact costing of Distance programmes in terms of monetary, institutional and individual inputs.

(2) Pressure on costs and human pressures would lead to more collaboration between institutions and individuals.

(3) Opportunity costs for the learner would be considered more, ie whether for example, a student would prefer a low-cost in-country distance programme whereby he/she could keep working and maintaining his/her family or a high-cost overseas programme, perhaps partially funded by an ILO.

(4) The whole range of potential options will be considered very carefully for each DL programme in order to maximise effect and keep down cost. The inventory of options considered will include the wide range of possibilities currently emerging from the new technology.

(5) The drive to keep costs down will lead to an increase in the use of casual hire materials writers, course planners, tutors and others. However this 'casualisation' will allow the number of individuals involved in mounting Distance programmes to increase together with an increasing demand for Distance Programmes.

**The New Technology**

The application of existing but relatively recent and of impending technology on distance Education and its applications to language was a topic which provided discussion throughout the seminar. Relatively recent possibilities included teleconferencing by PC using telephone links and satellite television broadcasts. Impending technology included "narrowcasting" (a satellite transmitting a narrow but powerful footprint to a specific audience), interactive satellite broadcasting and the transmission of video images via cable and with the assistance of compression technology. Participants felt that new directions relating to the new technology would include:-

(1) An increased use of individualisation ('bespoke materials').

(2) A valuable synergy between existing classroom practice and the opportunities presented by the new materials.

(3) The spread of technical literacy both within and outside the Education Sector.

(4) An increasing eclecticism in choosing delivery methods whether from the technology menu or from the conventional menu.

(5) An understanding that the potential use of technology would remain uncertain. Technological advances (-who had heard of the Walkman 20 years ago?-) have often headed off in unpredicted directions and this trend would continue.

(6) Educationalists having to be careful that their interest in and involvement with technology is founded on sound educational considerations and not based on naive belief in the applicability of new technology or be swayed by the persuasiveness of sales persons.

(7) Educationalists having to fight their corner to ensure that their own needs and not those of entertainment media people are served in 'educational' broadcasting.

(8) Educationalists having to ensure that language is explicitly on the agenda of educational programmes produced for the new media and that the manifold possibilities offered by the new technology are used to maximise effective language learning.

(9) The new technology being perceived as having a tremendous potential to assist developing countries to overcome their skills shortages in Education and that governments would inevitably exploit this potential. There was, however, a strong caveat to this: it was felt that a foreceful case would have to be made to ILOs and governments that to disseminate content programmes together with their language support materials was not in in itself an answer but that such materials, to be effective, would have to be planned with the same degree of commitment in terms of finance and logistical forethought as would in the best circumstances be applied to conventional classroom based instruction programmes.

**Conclusion**

In brief, participants felt that Distance Education and the language issues that it involves would be an important growth area in the field of Education both in the short and longer term. The twin factors of a general drive for cost-cutting and the potential being opened up by new technology would ensure this for better or worse. The drive for cost reduction would, it was felt, lead to a general concentration of resources in all Distance Learning sectors with the emergence of a greater number of consortia and within these there would be a greater use of teams in which the language expert would work alongside media and content specialists to produce learning packages. If things turned out badly, the field of Distance Education could be dominated by all-purpose materials of little value to anyone in particular. However, it was felt that with care and perseverance and the correct exploitation of the new technology the future of Distance Education would allow a more exact matching of learner materials to learner needs whereby materials were tailored to individual needs and the language requirements of students could be met exactly and efficiently.

Richard Webber

## 'DRAFT PROGRAMME

## DUNFORD SEMINAR 1993

## LANGUAGE ISSUES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

**25-31 July 1993**
**Alston Hall, Nr Preston**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Sunday 25 July** | 1600 | Arrivals and reception |
| **Monday 26 July** | 0900 to 0945 | Keynote speech<br>Dr R Bowers, ADG<br>The British Council |
| | 0945 to 1030 | Keynote speech<br>Dr R Iredale<br>Chief Education Adviser, ODA |
| | 1045 to 1130 | Keynote speech<br>Professor J Turner<br>University of Manchester |
| | 1130 to 1230 | Keynote speech<br>Professor Floyd<br>Open University |
| | 1245 to 1400 | Lunch |
| | 1400 to 1530 | The Tertiary Level<br><br>David Graddol<br>Centre for Language and<br>Communication, OU UK<br><br>Elizabeth Hoadley<br>Maidment Institute for<br>Health and Social Relations, OU UK<br><br>Anne Stevens<br>Centre for Modern Languages, OU UK<br>Rapporteur - David Hall |
| | 1545 to 1730 | The Tertiary Level<br>Open University Team<br>Rapporteur - David Hall |
| | 1815 to 1915 | Dinner |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | 1930 to 2030 | 'The Planning of Educational Satellite TV' Luisa Ruddiford Head of Programme Planning Operations and Development, World Service Television Rapporteur - Moses Mukabeta |
| **Tuesday 27 July** | 0900 to 1030 | Teacher Training, Bill Louw University of Zimbabwe Rapporteur - Richard Trewby |
| | 1045 to 1145 | Teacher Training, Bill Louw Rapporteur - Richard Trewby |
| | 1145 to 1245 | Teacher Training, Julian Edge Aston University Rapporteur - Melanie Ellis |
| | 1245 to 1400 | Lunch |
| | 1400 to 1530 | Secondary Training Mike Smith ELTO, Mauritius Rapporteur - Jim Morrison |
| | 1545 to 1730 | Secondary Training, Mike Smith Rapporteur - Jim Morrison |
| | 1815 to 1915 | Dinner |
| | 1930 to 2030 | Viewing Mauritius and Zimbabwe videos |
| **Wednesday 28 July** | 0900 to 1030 | 'Distance learning in Non-Formal Education' Tony Dodds - Director International Extension College Rapporteur - John Burke |
| | 1045 to 1230 | The Non-Formal Sector, IEC Rapporteur - John Burke |
| | 1245 to 1400 | Lunch |
| | 1400 to 1500 | 'The Potential for Distance Education the Linguistic Challenge and Realising that Challenge'. Discussion groups Discussion leader - Gordon Slaven |
| | 1515 to 1600 | Report back from Discussion Groups chaired by Gordon Slaven British Council |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | 1600 to 1800 | "The Role of BBC English in Distance Teaching" Chris Faram, Frances Cox and Hamish Norbrook<br>Rapporteur - Barry Sesnan |
| | 1815 to 1915 | Dinner |
| | | At leisure |
| **Thursday 29 July** | 0900 to 1030 | 'Issues in Materials Development',<br>Charlotte Creed and<br>Professor Badri Koul<br>Indira Ghandi National Open University<br>Rapporteur - Martin Parrott |
| | 1045 to 1230 | 'The Opportunity Cost of Distance Education'<br>Ron Boyle and Kate Mulvey<br>Rapporteur - Muriel Kirton |
| | 1245 to 1400 | Lunch |
| | 1400 to 1500 | The Practicalities of Running a Distance Programme<br>Gillian Walsh<br>University of Manchester<br>Rapporteur - David Taylor |
| | 1515 to 1730 | 'The "cost" of Distance Education'<br>Jim Morrison, Moray House<br>Rapporteur - David Taylor |
| | 1815 to 1915 | Dinner |
| | 1930 to 2030 | 'Individual Differences and Materials Design'<br>Eugene Sadler-Smith and<br>Sheila Llewellyn<br>British Gas Distance Learning Unit<br>Rapporteur - Robinah Kyeyune |
| **Friday 30 July** | 0900 to 0915 | Introduction to Speakers,<br>Caroline Moore<br>British Council |
| | 0915 to 1015 | 'Technical Developments, with special attention to Computer Conferencing'<br>Anita Pincas<br>University of London Institute of Education<br>Rapporteur - Liu Dailin |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | 1030 to 1130 | 'The Multi-Media Tele-School'<br>Charles Jennings<br>Southampton Institute<br>Rapporteur - Winnifred Hall |
| | 1130 to 1230 | 'The Use of Satellites in Distance Education'<br>Terry Brockley<br>Gwynedd Education Authority<br>Rapporteur - Kevin Germaine |
| | 1245 to 1400 | Lunch |
| | 1400 to 1530 | 'The role of High-Tech options in Distance Education: The language Dimension' Discussion Groups<br>Discussion leader - Caroline Moore |
| | 1545 to 1700 | Report back from Discussion Group chaired by Caroline Moore |
| | 1815 to 1915 | Dinner |
| **Saturday 31 May** | 0900 to 1000 | Round-up and Feedback Discussion chaired by Richard Webber<br>British Council |
| | 1030 to 1130 | Completion of Evaluation Questionnaires, Travel Claims and Fee Claims |
| | 1230 to 1330 | Lunch |
| | 1415 | Depart |

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